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"There's a dead body walking about the room!
One? — No! It is not one: it is five hundred!"

LIFE

AND

ADVENTURES

OF

MICHAEL ARMSTRONG,

THE FACTORY BOY.

BY FRANCES TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE WIDOW BARNABY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1840.

50-3

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LONDON:
Printed by WILLIAM CLOWES and SONS,
Stamford Street.

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THE

LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

MICHAEL ARMSTRONG,

THE FACTORY BOY.

CHAPTER I.

Miss Brotherton and her friend arrive at the Deep Valley—A review—Disappointment—"A sudden thought strikes" the Heiress—She concludes a bargain, though not the one which she meditated—She sets out upon a walk.

MR. TIMOTHY SMITH was punctual to his appointment, and, at a very few minutes past nine, Mrs. Tremlett and Mary were jogging along in the miller's jockey-cart, on a seat whereon cushions, that looked very like pillows, had been carefully strapped, and with a little stool placed before them, the sight of which conjured up so delightful a picture of the manner in which they should return, and the joy it

would be her lot to confer, and to witness, that the pretty eyes of the heiress sparkled through tears of pleasure, and she would not have exchanged her present expedition for the best party of pleasure that ever was devised by man.

A considerable part of the way was the same as that followed by Mr. Parsons when he conveyed Michael to the factory, and need not be again described. The tranquil loneliness of that portion of the road which ran along the stream, before it made the turn which brought the hideous prison-house in sight, lulled her spirits into a state that but ill prepared her for the aspect of the grim, desolate-looking dwelling into whose recesses she was about to penetrate; and when it suddenly became visible, something like a groan escaped her.

"I hope that jolt didn't hurt you, ma'am?" said the miller, turning towards her. "Here we are, safe and sound, and that's half my bargain, at any rate."

The vehicle drew up to a small door in the exterior wall of the extensive enclosure in which the buildings stood; Mr. Smith threw the reins upon the neck of his horse, and bringing his stout person cautiously to the ground, offered his services to assist the two ladies in doing the same.

Miss Brotherton trembled as she stood waiting till the miller's summons at the door should be answered. Now that the moment was come which was to decide the question of her success or failure, she no longer felt the same confidence which had cheered her while the trial was still distant, and her heart sunk with anticipated disappointment. Several minutes of irksome delay gave her time to dwell on these oppressive forebodings; and when the door was at length slowly and cautiously opened by Mr. Woodcomb himself, her pale face spoke such painful anxiety, that the suspicious guardian of the unholy spot was comforted, from the satisfactory conviction that her tale was true, and that she came not under any false pretences to look at that which he considered it to be the first duty of his life to conceal.

"Good morning, Smith—all's right, and all's ready for you. Walk in, ladies, if you please," said the stern manager, relaxing his habitual frown, and intending to be extremely gracious.

Mary and her friend stepped forward, and heard the stout lock and two heavy bolts secured behind them.

"This way, ladies, this way, if you please: there is no need to trouble you to enter the factory, which, do what we will to keep it nice, can

never be quite free from dust. You are a trifle after your time, Mr. Smith, but it's no matter; dinner-time is over, but if the ladies will walk into this room they shall have all satisfaction. Howsomever, as the young uns is again at work, I can't well stop the mills to march 'em in altogether. Nevertheless, I don't see but it may be quite as agreeable, or may be more, for the ladies to look at 'em one or two at a time."

Miss Brotherton did not attempt to speak, but placed herself in a chair near the open door, and bent her head to indicate that she was satisfied with the proposed arrangement.

"You had best walk this way with me, Mr. Smith," said the amiable Woodcomb, "the ladies look quite agitated, as is but natural, and would sooner be without strangers I don't doubt." A proposal which truly was a welcome one to all parties—for Mrs. Tremlett and Mary longed to be at liberty to speak without restraint—Mr. Smith was thirsting for his accustomed mug of ale, and the manager himself bursting to make a few inquiries respecting his mysterious visiters.

"Have you seen the colour of their money yet, friend Smith?" were the first words uttered as they crossed the court.

"Twenty good pounds," replied the miller, expressively patting the pocket where the trea-

sure lay, "and given as freely as if it had been twenty pence—out of a full pocket-book, too, Mr. Woodcomb, I can tell you that—and I can tell you besides, that your money's as sure as the bank, and your customer one as is thinking of her own concerns and not of yours."

"That's what I'm judging too, Mr. Smith. One can see in a minute if folks' eyes are roving here and there, up and down, to take account of all they can see. God grant that these poor whey-faced females may find what they want, and we shall both of us have made a good day's work of it. I sha'n't wish the thing talked of, that's a fact; not but what I shall be ready with an answer, if I'm troubled with questions. People as have money to throw about, like these folks, are not to be put off with a short word, and a lock turned in their faces. It mayn't chance once in a century that any such should trouble themselves concerning the cart-loads of live lumber as we takes off to relieve the overstocked parishes. But now it *is* come to pass, in course we must manage to get through it quietly—so I'm not without my answer, Mr. Smith, if the squire should hear of it, and make a riot."

"No, to be sure you arn't—besides there's no need to say nothing," replied the miller.

Mr. Woodcomb, in answer to this, gave an

assenting nod, and an approving smile. "Now then, my man," said he, more gaily than he often uttered any thing, "sit you down here, and you shall presently have a snack and a mug to keep you company. I'll see myself to the turning in a few of the hands at a time, to be looked at. For I have been thinking the matter over, Master Miller, and I judge it will make ten times less talk and tumult that way, than if they were all turned out at once. I'll have out a few boys and girls together, chance-like, just as they come—and ten to one nobody but Poulet will find out that there's any thing more going on than some job as I wants to get done."

Mr. Woodcomb accordingly proceeded to the different parts of the large establishment, and contrived, without stopping the work anywhere, to perform the task he had undertaken. As the selected children came forth from the various rooms, he told them to cross the court to the 'prentice-house, where they would find one as wanted to look at them, adding an order to come back again as quick as light, "if they didn't wish to be strapped dead."

Whenever such promises were made, Mr. Woodcomb was known to be strictly a man of his word; and Mary and her friend had soon gazed with anxious eyes and shuddering hearts

upon a greater number of half-starved trembling little wretches than could possibly have been made to pass before them in an equally short space of time by any other mode or process whatever.

They came so quickly in succession, however, that no interval was left in which Miss Brotherton and her faithful attendant could exchange a word on the melancholy panorama of human misery that passed before them. Strange and unwonted as was the spectacle of "two ladies sitting in the 'prentice-house," the cowed and frightened children for the most part did little more than stand before her with eyes and mouth wide open for a single minute, and then start off again; while Mary herself aided the celerity of the process by a shake of the head, and a wave of the hand, which indicated plainly enough that they were not to stay, but go.

"What a multitude, nurse Tremlett!" she exclaimed at length, her spirits worn with repeated disappointments, and the contemplation of the wretched creatures for whom she knew she brought no help. "The train seems endless!"

The old woman returned her a speaking look, and whispered in her ear—"Could you not question them, Mary? Might not this dismal work be shortened by your asking them if the

boy is here? They can't have any reason to hide him. They can't be agents of Sir Matthew."

Mary took the hint, and said to the next young skeleton that presented itself—"Can you tell me if there is a boy here named Michael Armstrong?"

The result was a stupid and silent stare, and, without answering, the child darted off like the rest. Thrice she repeated the question, but with no better success, for two out of the three were among those newly arrived to supply vacancies caused by the late mortality; and the third, from working and sleeping in another chamber, had never heard poor Michael's name. "No!" was pronounced by this one; "No, ma'am," by the two new-comers, and Mary's heart almost failing her, she resumed her silent examination. In truth, there was in most of the unhappy faces that thus presented themselves such a look of blighted intellect, and dogged apathy, that she clung to the ever-lessening hope of seeing the boy appear, in preference to any further questioning. And thus the coming and going lasted for another half-hour without a word being spoken.

At length the sad monotony of the spectacle was broken, at least to the eyes of Mary, by the

appearance of a little girl, who, though pale and lamentably thin, had not yet lost thereby the sweet expression of her delicate features, neither had the soul within yielded to the paralyzing influence of the hopeless, helpless, unvarying misery by which she was surrounded. Her soft gray eyes still retained their eloquent power of speaking, and the look of surprise, mixed with something that was almost approaching to pleasure, with which she fixed them upon Mary's face caused her to make a sudden movement to detain her, as the child, following the example of the rest, was turning away. At first this movement was caused entirely by the interest which the little creature herself inspired—but it almost immediately occurred to her, that here, at length, there was a chance of receiving a rational and intelligent answer to any question she might ask; and such strength did this idea gain as she continued to look at the child, that she told Mrs. Tremlett to stop the approach of those who were coming on, and by keeping them waiting in the court for a minute or two, to give her time to see if she could not learn something from this most interesting-looking little creature. Mrs. Tremlett showed that she too thought something might now be hoped for, and with great alacrity stepped out into the court to meet

the fresh arrivals, shutting, to Mary's extreme satisfaction, the door of the room behind her.

"My dear little girl!" said Miss Brotherton, taking the child's pale and slender hand in her's, "How came you in this sad place? You do not look as if you were used to it."

"Not for very long, ma'am," was the reply.

"But you have been here during the few last weeks?"

"I have been here for several months," answered the little girl.

"Can you tell me"—and Mary almost gasped as she asked the question—"Can you tell me if there be a boy here called Michael Armstrong?"

The look of modest and well-pleased curiosity with which the soft eyes were fixed on Mary's face, was instantly changed for an expression of deep anguish—for a few moments no reply was uttered, and large tears were already chasing each other down her cheeks before the trembling child found voice to speak; at last she uttered, almost in a whisper, and still looking through her tears in Mary's face—"Michael Armstrong is dead!"

"Dead!—Oh, do not say so!" cried Mary in a voice so shrill as to reach the ears of Mrs. Tremlett, who immediately opening the door,

close to which she had been stationed, entered in dismay, exclaiming,

"What is the matter, Mary? For Heaven's sake, tell me, was it you who cried out in such a piercing voice?"

Several of the children, who were by this time assembled in the court, followed at her heels, thrusting open the door, and staring at the scene before them.

"Shut the door, nurse Tremlett!—Send them away—send them all away—I have no further need to see them!" said poor Mary, weeping from sorrow, disappointment, and complete prostration of spirits. Before she spoke another word, Mrs. Tremlett obeyed her instructions, and gently pushing back the curious throng, closed and bolted the door.

"Now tell me then, my poor dear child, what new sorrow has come upon you? Sure nothing dreadful has happened to the poor little fellow?"

"Nurse Tremlett, he is dead!" replied Mary, weeping afresh, as if the boy had indeed been her brother.

"Lack-a-day for his poor mother!" cried Mrs. Tremlett, "these are bad tidings to take home with us, after all our trouble and pains.

Oh, Mary, dear, I wish you had never left your home!"

"Say not so, Mrs. Tremlett," said Mary, recovering herself, "certainty is ever better than doubt—and here, here is one I may still save from misery. What is your name, my dear child, and who was it sent you to this dreadful place?"

"My name is Fanny Fletcher," said the little girl, "and it was mother's parish that sent me here as soon as she was dead."

"Have you no other friends?—no relations any where who could take care of you?" demanded Miss Brotherton, with quickness.

"No, ma'am, nobody," replied Fanny; but in saying this, the child ceased to weep, and, young as she was, an expression of such hopeless, yet enduring composure took possession of her beautiful features, that Mary's memory instantly applied to her Byron's thrilling words—

> "My thoughts their dungeon know too well;
> Back to my breast the wanderers shrink,
> And bleed within their secret cell."

"Tell me, Fanny," she said, "tell me quickly, should you not like to come away from this place? I came here to take away poor Michael

Armstrong. I was to pay money for taking him, and I will pay it now for *you*, if you will tell me that you wish to come, and will be a good girl to me."

"Poor Michael!" said Fanny, while her tears again began to flow.

"Speak, Fanny! shall I take you with me?" cried Mary, impatiently, for she heard without the door the sound of a heavy step approaching. Fanny Fletcher heard it too, and an almost ghastly paleness spread itself over her face and lips; she seemed choking, and perfectly unable to articulate, but clasping her hands together, and dropping on her knees before Miss Brotherton, raised her eloquent eyes to her face with a look which required no commentary.

"Open the door, Mrs. Tremlett!" said Mary. "Don't you hear the knocking? This is the child I shall take away with me," she added in a whisper, and with a look that her friend perfectly understood.

Mrs. Tremlett opened the door, and the well-pleased Mr. Woodcomb stood before them.

"That's well," he said, looking at the kneeling child, and at Mary, whose arm encircled her neck, with an air of great complacency. "I thought by what those said, as you sent back without looking at 'em, that you had found what

you wanted. And now, ladies, I hope you remember the conditions."

"Do not doubt it, sir," replied Miss Brotherton, instantly drawing forth her pocket-book. "Here is a note of one hundred pounds to repay the trouble I have given you, and here, a second of the same value to atone for the loss of Fanny's labour."

"All right, ma'am," said Mr. Woodcomb, very graciously, "and if you had but told me that it was a little girl, with a very pretty face, and that her name was Fanny, I could have saved you all your trouble, for we don't happen to have another that would answer to that description."

"I have taken no trouble, sir, that I at all regret," replied Miss Brotherton, "but I am anxious to set off on my return without any further loss of time. Will you have the kindness to inquire if Mr. Smith is ready ?"

"I don't doubt, ma'am, but he will be ready to obey orders, though the horse have hardly been baited well yet. Howsomever, those as pay well generally looks to have things done in a little less time than other folks ; and it's very right and fair that so it should be. If a horse can stand, he ought to go, if his owner is well paid—there is no doubt of it."

"I should be sorry to distress the horse," said Mary, "and if he be not sufficiently rested, we must wait."

"At your pleasure, ladies, at your pleasure. Pray sit down and make yourselves comfortable. And of course your ladyship would like to have this pretty little girl here made as decent as we can manage; the dirtiest part of her clothes can be changed easy, though the missis of the 'prentice-house being lately dead, puts us out a little in our management. However, if little Miss Fanny, as we must call her now, will please to come up stairs with me, I can make her look a deal better, I will answer for it."

Fanny Fletcher having been raised from her kneeling position by the hand of Miss Brotherton, still continued to hold that hand tightly, and the young lady now felt so strong a compression of her fingers, and was at the same time conscious of so tremulous a movement in the person of the child, as she nestled closely to her, that she felt persuaded the proposal of Mr. Woodcomb had frightened her.

"You are very kind," she replied, drawing the child, sordid as its wretched garments were, still closer to her, "you are very kind, sir. But I shall prefer taking her away, exactly as I first looked upon her."

"Dear me! only to think of that now! That's the beauty of what's called natural affection! Then if you will please to keep seated I'll go tell Miller Smith as you're ready, and all the business done, so as he may set off as soon as he is able."

Mary again thanked him for his civility, but felt disposed to think that he might have executed his mission more satisfactorily, when he returned in about three minutes, with the assurance that Master Smith would be ready to start in little less than an hour.

An hour at that moment seemed to Miss Brotherton an almost interminable space of time; she felt painfully conscious of being "confined and pent up" with sin and suffering. Heated, agitated, and impatient—panting for the fresh air, and longing to question her little purchased protégée concerning poor Michael, she determined to walk forward on the road they had that morning traversed, and letting Mr. Smith and his cart overtake them.

"Should you dislike walking on, Mrs. Tremlett?" she said. "My head aches, and I am sure nothing will relieve me but a walk."

"I should like it too, my dear," replied her observant companion, looking anxiously in her face, and perfectly understanding her feelings.

"Walk, ladies!" exclaimed Mr. Woodcomb, looking exceedingly shocked, "ladies such as you to walk out upon our wild moors? Oh dear no! That is quite impossible!"

This was said to prove at once his tender care of personages possessing the power of dispensing hundreds, and to show that he was not unacquainted with the refinements of polite society; but this civilly-intended opposition to their exit produced on his hearers an effect very different from what he intended.

That Fanny Fletcher should tremble at the mention of delay was not extraordinary, but that Mary should hear again, in fancy, the grating sound of the locks and bars, which had closed behind her as she entered, and feel a sick qualm at her heart, as if she were betrayed and doomed to remain in that hateful spot against her will, showed that her nerves had indeed been severely shaken, and that her heroism had more of zeal than strength in it.

Mrs. Tremlett, too, looked exceedingly annoyed, though certainly without the same lively recollection of the bolts and bars; but she was so accustomed to consult the wishes of her young companion, and to feel at ease herself only when she saw her so, that she too coloured with impatience, and sustaining admirably her character

of aunt, said, "I beg pardon, sir, but I know my niece's constitution so well, that I am quite sure the jolting of that rough cart would not do for her just at present. She is a great walker, and a mile or so creeping along in the fresh air will do her a deal of good."

"In course you know best, ladies, and I can't, for certain, take the liberty to oppose. But, by your leave, I'll just mention your plan to Mr. Smith before you start, and then, maybe, he'll be for pushing on his horse a little."

So saying, Mr. Woodcomb left them; when Mary, turning to the little girl, said, "Have you any bonnet and shawl to put on, Fanny?"

"I don't know," replied the girl.

"Not know? How can that be, Fanny?"

"Because I have never been out of the doors since I first came into them," said Fanny.

"Poor dear! I wish they would not keep you here any longer—this is quite intolerable!" said Mary, again opening the door, and looking impatiently across the dismal court.

"Keep me here?" murmured the little girl, in a voice of the most evident terror. "Do you think they will keep me here?"

"No, no, my poor child, they shall not keep you here," said Mrs. Tremlett, kindly. "Here come the two men together."

Fanny did not venture to look at them, but Mary did; and again, in spite of her reason, she felt terrified at the idea that she was in their power. Mr. Woodcomb, indeed, looked smiling and obsequious as before, but in the countenance of the burly miller there was something of opposition and displeasure that she could not understand.

"Setting off walking, miss, is very like bilking your driver," said he, with considerably more bluntness than civility.

"What does he mean, Mrs. Tremlett?" said Mary, turning pale.

"You had better pay the gentleman before you set out, my dear. That's what you mean to say, isn't it, sir?"

"Why surely, ma'am, it would be more like doing business," replied the man, looking a little ashamed of himself.

"Is that all?" said Mary, inexpressibly relieved, and drawing out her ready purse with such cheerful alacrity, that could the hearts of the two men before whom she stood have been read, there might have been found in both a strong inclination to profit by it a little further.

"That, I think, sir, is the sum you named for the hire of your vehicle?" said Mary, ex-

tending her hand with two sovereigns towards him.

Mr. Timothy Smith took the money, but certainly thought that if that sharp-eyed rogue Woodcomb had been further he might have hit upon some excuse for demanding more. As it was, however, he could not venture it, and with a rather surly inclination of the head, pocketed the gold, and left the room.

"Now then, sir, if you please," said the still frightened Mary, "we will wish you good morning."

"Yes, ma'am, surely, you can go if you please. Only perhaps you might like, for the honour of your young relation here, to leave some little gratuity to be divided as a little treat among her late companions?"

Mary looked in his face, and the sort of half-ashamed glance with which the extortioner watched the effect of his words, appeared to her so sinister, that with a sudden feeling of something like rational alarm, she remembered that she had only a few shillings left in her purse, and that again to open in his presence her still-well filled pocket-book might be dangerous.

"Aunt Tremlett, have you any money to lend

me?" she said, at the same time drawing out again her almost empty purse. "I am very sorry I have only these few shillings left; but I will willingly send you five pounds, sir, for the purpose you mention, if the miller will take the trouble of bringing it to you?"

"Oh! it's no matter, ladies. Pray do not trouble yourselves any more about it," replied Woodcomb, keeping his eyes, however, furtively directed towards Mrs. Tremlett, who was still engaged in seeking for money in the recesses of a very large pocket.

"I have two pounds and a few shillings, my dear," said the old lady, at length placing her little leathern purse in Mary's hand.

"That will do, that will do perfectly," said the worshipper of Mammon, with an air and tone of the most amiable liberality, but at the same time stretching out his hand, in which he received the entire contents, uncounted, of Mrs. Tremlett's purse, which Miss Brotherton unclasped, and emptied into it.

Had she studied the man's character for years, she could not have devised any manœuvre so likely to hasten the unlocking the door which enclosed them as thus emptying their two purses before his eyes. He now moved forward of his own accord, drew forth from the pocket of his

coat the massive key, applied it with a large, strong, and effective hand to the enormous lock, drew back the heavy bolts, and finally threw wide the hateful door.

The three females passed through it with no lingering steps, and heard it close heavily behind them, with feelings assuredly very different in degree, but in so far the same, that each one as she stepped over the threshold breathed a prayer that she might never repass it again.

CHAPTER II.

The walk proves too fatiguing to one of the party, but not to Miss Brotherton—She wanders further, and meets with an adventure, but at last returns in safety to her inn—A journey homeward, and a fact related without ornament.

It is but a dreary and desolate landscape which greets the eye immediately without the walls of the Deep Valley factory; but to all who are happy enough to feel that they are quitting those hideous walls for ever, it can hardly fail to convey a sense of beauty, freshness, and freedom, sufficient to expand the heart with admiration and delight. Mary felt disposed to bound along the grassy path beside the stream with the joyous playfulness of a child, and rather than have re-entered that creaking door again, would have been tempted, like another Undine, to plunge into the water, and take her chance of finding quarters less hateful beneath its rippling wave. Mrs. Tremlett breathed more freely, and seemed to have recovered the elastic step of youth,

as she moved briskly on. But, compared with what was passing in the breast of the ragged, dirty little creature that walked beside them, their feelings were most earthly, cold, and dull. Her small hand was still clasped in that of Miss Brotherton, who felt that the child was urging her onward, even faster than she was inclined to go, while her head upturned towards the towering heights which hemmed them in, seemed eagerly seeking an outlet from the region that her soul abhorred.

"You are glad, dear Fanny, are you not, to know that you have left that frightful place?" said Mary, kindly pressing the little emaciated hand she held in her's. The child stopped short in her hurried walk, and looking up in her deliverer's face, with a doubting, anxious look that it was painful to see, murmured very softly, and as if fearing to be overheard from within the walls,

"Shall I never, never go back again?"

"No, never, Fanny? Do you think I would be so cruel as to take you back?" said Mary.

"I do not know if it is not all a dream," replied the child. "I have dreamed that I saw green grass, and felt the air upon my face before."

"Do not be afraid, Fanny? You are not dreaming now," returned Mary. "Run on, and

gather that fine large stalk of foxglove. You never saw such a gay flower as that in your dreams, did you?"

The little girl sprang forward, and falling upon her knees on the grass, plucked the tall flower, and pressed it to her lips, and to her heart. But though this was a childish action, it was not done childishly: there was an appearance of deep feeling, and even of devotion, in her look and attitude which strongly awakened Mary's interest; and when the little creature rose again, and holding the flower in one hand, slid the other once more into that of her new friend, the heart of that friend yearned towards her with newly-awakened tenderness. But when she spoke to her, and endeavoured to lead her into conversation, the attempt entirely failed. There are many who might have felt disappointed and chilled by this; but Mary Brotherton had truer sympathy, and as, from time to time, she felt a loving contraction of Fanny's little fingers upon her own and sometimes caught her looking up, as if by stealth into her face, she felt no misgivings as to the cause of her silence, but loved her the better from knowing that her heart was too full to speak.

They all, and as if moved by one common impulse, walked quickly forward as long as their

road continued along the margin of the stream; but when it turned round the steep hill's base, and began to mount, their pace relaxed. Mary felt that her little companion dragged on her steps with labour, and perceived that Mrs. Tremlett was out of breath.

"Let us sit down under this ash-tree, and wait for the jolly miller," said Miss Brotherton: "it cannot be very long, I think, before he overtakes us."

This proposal was the more amiable, because, in the first place, Mary could herself have run from the bottom of that steep hill to the top, almost without perceiving that it was any hill at all; and, in the next, she so exceedingly disliked both the miller and his cart, that had she consulted her own inclinations alone, she would probably have preferred retracing the whole way on foot.

But very gladly was her proposal for rest accepted, by both her old and young companion, and long did they remain seated under their pleasant canopy before they any of them grew weary of it: till at length, after consulting her watch, Miss Brotherton expressed a doubt whether the fat miller and his lazy steed intended to overtake them at all.

"Good gracious, my dear! do you really think

so?" said Mrs. Tremlett, considerably alarmed. "Why, Mary, we shall never get back to Mrs. Prescot's without him!"

"I hope I may be mistaken, my dear old woman," said her kind mistress, affectionately; "for I fear such a walk would be too much for you. But when I remember that he is paid, and remember, likewise, how very little he seemed actuated by any motive, save that of sordid interest, I confess that I do think it very probable he means to leave us in the lurch."

"Then let us walk on, Miss Mary, without saying a word more about it. The shadows are beginning to grow long already, and you shan't be kept out half the night by my laziness. Come along, little girl."

With these words, Mrs. Tremlett raised herself from between two comfortable roots, which had made her an excellent arm-chair; but the little girl whom she summoned to do likewise, though she exerted herself to get on her feet, seemed hardly able to stand.

"My poor Fanny, you are quite knocked up!" exclaimed Miss Brotherton, looking at her with great anxiety. "How in the world shall we ever be able to get her on?"

"It is only because I have not been used to walk lately," said Fanny; "that is, not as we

have been walking now. Our work keeps us always on our legs, and that makes them bend about so when I try to walk; but I *can* walk, though it hurts me, and I think it would be better to die outright in getting on, rather than rest so near the factory—so, please, ma'am, I'm quite ready to go on."

And again the party set off; but the difficulty with which the little Fanny got along became more obvious at every step, and it soon became evident that to get as far as Mrs. Prescot's would be impossible. The dilemma was not a pleasant one. They were still in a part of the road so little frequented, that it was probable they might wait for hours without obtaining assistance from any passer-by; nor did either Mrs. Tremlett or Mary recollect to have seen any dwelling nearer than the high-road, from which they were still at a considerable distance.

The distress of the little girl was painful to witness. At the very moment when the dark cloud which had seemed to settle upon her was withdrawn, and hope gradually and with difficulty, as to eyes long unaccustomed to its light, began to reach her—at that very moment her strength failed, and a sensation, like the sickness of death, rendered every attempt at further exertion impossible.

"I must stay here," she said; "it is the will of God."

"No, no, Fanny," said Miss Brotherton, seating herself beside her, and letting the languid little head drop upon her bosom; "you have no reason to think that, while I have a thousand to believe the contrary. It is a most strange chance which has brought me here, and placed you in my hands—this was by the will of God, and I will not believe it has so chanced, only that I may see you die."

"You must not stay here," said Fanny, feebly; "night will come presently, and you must go fast to get home. Do not be sorry for me—but, indeed, I think I am as bad as Michael was, when he fell sick, and was carried away to die."

"Did you see—" began Mary, eagerly; but suddenly stopping herself, she added, "Not now, my poor Fanny, you must not tell me about it now—when I have got you strong and well at my own home, we will talk of poor Michael. Try, now, to think how glad you will be when we have got you home, and all our difficulties are over! But something must be done, I know, my poor child, before this can be. How had we best act in this dilemma, Mrs. Tremlett? Do you think you shall have courage to remain with this poor child while I run on, and en-

deavour to find some house where we may get assistance?"

"Alone, Miss Mary?" replied the good woman, looking terribly alarmed. "How can I let you set off in a strange, wild country like this, with nobody to take care of you? Let us go together, Mary; nothing can hurt this little girl, you know, while we are away."

"Think it over once more, dear Tremlett," said Mary, "and then I believe you will perceive that there is more chance of your being useful to her than to me. I shall get on faster without you, good nurse, and with a lighter heart than if I took you for company, while this little creature was left with nothing but her own melancholy thoughts and childish terrors to comfort her."

"Then I will stay," said the poor woman, sighing heavily; "but just think, Miss Mary, how I shall feel till you come back again!"

"I will not loiter to amuse myself," replied her young mistress, with a cheering smile; "and now take my place, and let this poor little head rest on your shoulder."

"She shall lie down on that bit of level turf yonder, with her head upon my lap," said the old nurse, tenderly assisting Mary to lift her up.

"God bless you, my dear good soul! I will be quickly back again," replied her grateful mistress. "How much more you show you love me now, than if you insisted upon walking after me. There! she lies as nicely as if she were in bed. If our faithless miller makes his appearance, keep him and his cart till I come back; tell him he shall have more gold, and he will stand waiting beside you, as gentle as a lamb."

Having said these comforting words, Mary hastened onward, and was speedily out of sight. Having reached the top of the hill, she looked anxiously round in search of a human dwelling, but nothing met her eye, but barren moor-land, which at some distance showed symptoms of cultivation, being inclosed in patches by low stone walls, and here and there the fragment of a stunted hawthorn fence, which seemed to sustain a hungry life with difficulty. Making her way across the rude and imperfectly-formed sunk fence, which marked the boundary of the cart-road, along which they had travelled in the morning, Mary found herself on a level of some extent, but without the slightest track to direct her steps amidst the long, parched grass, and frequent stones with which it was covered.

"This will never do! I may walk here till I have completely lamed myself, without a chance

of meeting any living soul," thought Mary, stopping short: "I shall do better by making for the high-road at once."

And having so decided, she turned about to retrace her steps, and regain the road; but ere she reached it, a sort of hillock at a little distance caught her eye, and wishing to take advantage of its elevation, for the purpose of reconnoitring, she turned aside to reach it. Her approach to it was from the east, and a dazzling sunset was in her eyes, as she made her way up the rugged side of what looked like one of the tumuli which served as resting-places for human bones, ere churchyards yawned for them. Greatly was she startled on reaching the top of it, to perceive on the western side, crouching in a hollow that looked as if it had been excavated by the shelter-seeking sheep, a strange wild figure, whose dress, as she looked down upon it, left its sex doubtful. The fragment of a hat, and the remnant of a jacket, were evidently intended, by their original construction, for the use of the nobler sex, while something resembling a petticoat, enveloping the lower half of the figure, suggested the probability that the masculine portion of the attire was worn by sufferance, and not by right.

Mary's light step among the matted tufts of coarse vegetation which covered the thin soil had

not been heard, and she stood looking down upon her doubtful neighbour with the advantage of being herself unseen.

"There goes another day!" said a voice, which, though harsh and aged, was unmistakably female; "and the silly soul has got to wait for another."

Glad to find that her unexpected companion in this most desolate spot was of the safer, because the weaker, portion of the human race, the wandering heiress determined to address her; but deemed it wisest to approach her visibly, instead of startling the poor soul by speaking to her unexpectedly from the spot where she stood. For this purpose she gently descended from her elevation, and, making a little circuit, presented herself before the eyes of the sun-gazer.

The old woman, for such she was, sat nose and knees together, in a sort of hole which completely sheltered her in every direction but the west; and from the earnest manner in which her dim eyes were fixed upon the last bright rays of the setting sun, it seemed as if her lair was chosen on purpose to look upon it.

The appearance of Mary seemed to startle her, but not much; for, after looking at her for a minute as if she examined her person with difficulty, because her eyes were dazzled by the

object on which she had before been gazing, she said, pointing a stick that she held towards the point whence the bright orb just disappeared,

"Who be you, coming to spy out old Sally at her devotions?"

"I want to find a house, my good woman, for I have left a poor child very ill at a short distance from hence; I want to find people who can help me to remove her."

"There are no people here," said the old woman, in a gentle but melancholy voice, and turning her eyes round the desolate moor as if in confirmation of the assertion.

"But perhaps you may be able to tell me where I can find some one?"

"O dear! O dear! there is no want of finding for such as you. Just go upon the high-road and turn yourself about, and say, 'Come to me,' and you'll be seeing 'em flock in, right and left, and north and south, all bowing and scraping as genteel as possible. 'Tis only me as lives in a hole, and prays to the sun every night to be so kind as not to wake me the next morning; 'tis only me that never sees anybody. I am the only woman in all the world—all the rest have got their death in the factories."

There are many circumstances of more danger

I am the only old woman in the world!
All the rest get their death in the factories!

that are infinitely less appalling than meeting, when out of sight of every other human being, a poor, frail, shattered remnant of humanity with a disordered wit. Mary shuddered, as the wild speech of this poor creature confirmed the idea of insanity which her appearance suggested, and her first impulse was to turn and run. But her steps were stayed by the shrill, trembling voice of the old woman, who, in an accent the most helpless and forlorn, called after her—

"One minute—only stay one minute! Let me look at you one minute!"

Mary turned again, and all feeling of terror was lost in pity as she beheld the miserable little crippled figure which was hobbling towards her. Her height hardly reached that of an ordinary child of twelve years old, her gait showed that her legs were dreadfully deformed, her uncouth garments hung about her in tatters, and as she painfully rolled herself at every step round the stick by whose aid she was supported, it was hardly possible to conceive a more complete image of poverty and decrepitude than her whole appearance offered.

"Do not hurry so!" cried Mary, every idea of alarm lost in contemplating her suffering helplessness. "I will not go yet, if you wish me to stay." They were now close together, and

the shaking creature looked up in her face, with a soft, silly smile, that had all the woeful innocence of imbecility. With a small skinny hand, that was delicately pale and perfectly clean, she took the end of Mary's silk scarf, and gazed upon it in a sort of ecstacy. "Oh, fine! oh, pretty, pretty, pretty!" she exclaimed, smoothing and patting it with her hand, as if it had been a tame and favourite bird. "I think," she added, with a sagacious nod, "that I know where you come from. This is just the things, I know, that they wear in heaven—I think I know where you come from." Then breaking into what sounded like a genuine laugh, she again repeated, "I think I know where you come from—that is what the overlooker-man said to me," she added, lowering her voice to a whisper, "when he caught me running away from the factory. It is not so very long ago—I can tell you all about it, if you would like to hear—and it is not like the rest of the things you know," touching her forehead with her forefinger; "I don't tell that backwards and forwards, nonsense-fashion, like the other things I talk about—that was beat in upon my brain by the blacksmith, and nothing can ever take it out again, they say, till one of the angels does it in heaven. It used to pain me a good deal,"

she continued, taking off her hat, and laying her open palm on the top of her head; "but since I took to sitting on my throne there, as the folks call it, and gathered the dew morning and night to put upon it, the pain is a deal better."

"I cannot hear your story now," said Mary, gently, "because there is a poor sick girl on the side of the hill that wants me very bad—she comes from the factory, too, and she is too ill to walk—can you tell me where I can find anybody to help me carry her?"

"Come from the factory, is she? Dear, dear, dear, dear! She will be sure to die, you may depend upon it—they all do die, except me. Don't you fancy that you'll ever take her back alive: it was only I that could bear that, and I was burnt in the head for it, as I told you."

"I do not want to take her back," said Mary, "I want to help her. Where do you live? Are there any houses or people near this place? Now, be a good woman, and take me where I can find somebody to help us."

"Yes, I will," replied the poor creature, in a tone which convinced Miss Brotherton that she understood her, and at the same time beginning to hobble on before her towards the road.

Nothing probably less pressing and less hopeless than her present position could have tempted

Mary to trust herself to such a guide; yet she felt a strange sort of confidence that the old woman knew what she was about, and though aware that the experiment was rather a desperate one, determined to follow wherever her feeble guide should lead, certain, at least, that the distance could not be very great.

There was, however, much more strength and power of locomotion in the little cripple than she gave her credit for. Having contrived to crawl through the grassy dyke that fenced the moor, she crossed the road obliquely, and making her way through a very imperfect hedge of furze and quickset, hobbled on across a bit of miserably arid stubble, which presently descended abruptly, and led to a tuft of stunted elder-bushes, beside which stood a small farm-house, with its cow-yard, barns, and ricks.

Surprised and delighted to find herself so near a human dwelling, Mary had hardly patience to restrain her steps to the pace of her poor guide, nevertheless she had not the heart to leave her, for there was an expression of pride and pleasure in the woman's eye as she turned round from time to time as they advanced, which she felt it would be most cruel to check by showing that she could do without her. So it was together that they reached the bottom of the steep descent, and to-

gether that they entered the kitchen of the farm-house where a very decent-looking middle-aged woman was engaged in preparing supper. She looked exceedingly surprised at the appearance of Miss Brotherton, and for a moment turned her eyes from her to her companion, and back again, with an air that was almost bewildered; but soon recovering herself, she courtesied with much respect, and said, "I hope you haven't been scared, ma'am, by falling in with this poor cretur? She is as harmless as a baby."

"Oh, no!" replied Mary, "she has been very kind to me, for she has brought me here, where I should never have been able to get without her, the house is so completely concealed—and I want help, ma'am, very much indeed."

"You haven't met no accident, I hope?" said the good woman, kindly; and ceasing her notable operations, she drew forward a wooden chair for her guest to sit upon.

"Thank you very much," said the young lady, seating herself. "Yet it is not rest I most want. I have a little girl with me whom I have left by the side of the road that leads from the mills; she is too weak and ill to get on, and I hope you will be able to lend me some conveyance—a cart, a waggon, anything to take her as far as the King's Head, three or four miles, I

suppose, from hence, upon the turnpike-road: I would pay well for it."

"From the mills?" repeated the woman, staring.

"Yes; from the place called Deep Valley Mill," replied Mary, "perhaps rather more than a mile from here."

"Oh! ma'am, I know the Deep Valley Mill well enough," was the answer. "All Mr Woodcomb's own butter and milk comes from here. That is not the difficulty. But we shan't like to have nothing to do with carrying away any child from there."

"You need fear nothing on that point," replied Miss Brotherton, eagerly; "I have paid for permission to bring this child away."

"That alters the case for certain. But—I ask your pardon, ma'am—there is something very odd, too, in such a lady as you walking away from the factory with one of the children."

"Indeed I do not wonder at your saying so. But, believe me, I tell nothing but the truth when I assure you that I have permission, and have paid largely for it, to bring this child away. Our unfortunately attempting to walk was merely accident, and occasioned entirely by my foolish impatience to get away from the place before Mr. Smith, the miller, who took me there,

thought his horse sufficiently rested to return."

"Mr. Smith, the miller? Then for certain all's right—for they be known for the greatest of friends, Mr. Woodcomb and he—and I dare say my husband, ma'am, would be proud to help you when he comes home. It's coming dark fast, and he won't be long, I dare say."

"But I must go back to this poor child; I have left her with an old lady, who will, I fear, be greatly alarmed at being left so long," said Mary.

"*Poor child!*" repeated her limping guide, who, from the moment they had entered, had been reposing herself by sitting on the floor, and had not spoken till now. "*Poor child!*—think of that!—and she comes from the factory! Think of speaking in that way of a factory child!"

"Hold your tongue, Sally, or I'll give you no porridge for supper," said the woman, but by no means harshly; and as she spoke, she dropped into the maniac's lap a piece of bread that lay in a plate upon the table.

"Had your factory child got this now," said poor Sally, nodding her head with a sort of boastful exultation, "she would not be so terrible bad. But there's nobody but me as gets this. I am the only old woman in the world; all the

rest die young—and most of 'em," she added, in a whisper, "before they get away."

"Was this poor creature at the Deep Valley factory when she was young?" demanded Miss Brotherton.

"She tells you quite true, ma'am," replied the farmer's wife, resuming her cookery, which consisted in chopping up bacon, cabbage, and potatoes, for the frying-pan. "She talks nonsense about the moon sometimes, and is very wild when it comes to the full, but she never makes any blunder when she tells of her own troubles at the factory. She never varies the least bit in the world when she tells about her getting away, and being stopped, and taken back again, poor cretur. 'Tis only too true, that's the worst of it—and she has never been in her right mind since."

"I would hear her tell it willingly, and should listen to it with great interest," said Miss Brotherton; "but at this moment I can think of nothing but those I have left."

"Whereabouts be they, ma'am?" demanded the farmer's wife.

Mary described the spot very accurately. "Why, dear me! them surely must be the trees right against our gate," said the good woman, with great apparent satisfaction. "And if so be as I'm

right, tis hardly more than a stone's throw from our back gate. I take it, ma'am, as you walked by the lane just round our farm, and them trees as you speak of bean't not one quarter of the distance as you have come."

"In that case," replied Miss Brotherton, greatly comforted, "I have no doubt that we could get the poor little girl here; and then if you would give us leave to remain till your husband has contrived to procure some sort of conveyance for us, all our troubles would be over, and most gratefully will I repay you for your assistance."

"I will show you the way this moment, ma'am," said the woman, with great alacrity; and once more suspending her labours for the good man's supper, she prepared to attend the lady by taking off an external apron, and smoothing that which was below it.

Though not quite *within a stone's throw*, the spot to which Miss Brotherton was so anxious to return was reached by a very short cut across the piece of meadow-ground on which the back part of the farm-house opened.

The joy of Mrs. Tremlett at seeing her was great indeed; and poor Fanny, refreshed by the interval of rest, declared herself quite able to walk "a good piece more."

"Poor little creature!" exclaimed good Mrs.

Roberts, the farmer's wife; "she do look bad, sure enough! It is seldom or never that we gets a sight of the children at the mill, for they sends regular for what they wants, and bean't over fond of having any body go near 'em;—but she puts me strongly in mind of old Sally's stories to be sure!"

The little party reached the farm without difficulty, and then, indeed, as Mary had predicted, all their present troubles seemed over, for nothing could exceed the earnest kindness with with Mrs. Roberts administered to all their wants. Mrs. Tremlett's appearance and manner appeared to have entirely removed the sort of doubtful impression which poor Mary's hurried *entrée* had produced; and having been told that the little girl had been reclaimed by them as a relation, the whole adventure appeared to her as one of the deepest interest, and her sympathy and good-will were most fully excited.

Old Sally was sitting upon the floor exactly where they had left her. "Poor thing!" exclaimed Mary, "she has not moved an inch."

"Not she, poor soul," replied Mrs. Roberts; "I told her to bide still, and when we says that to her, she'd keep still, if we was to be away a whole day, I believe. Get up, Sally," she added, good-humouredly, "There's a brave woman!

Look at that little girl, and tell the ladies what she puts you in mind of."

The expression of the poor withered, idiot face, that was turned upon Fanny Fletcher when this was uttered, was most touchingly sad and solemn. The gentle, silly look, which her countenance usually wore, was exchanged for one full of deep mysterious meaning. She drew herself towards the little girl with a sort of stealthy movement, as if afraid of being seen to approach her, and when quite close beside her said,

"You then have done as I did—you have run away? Poor, poor little thing! Can't you guess what will come next? Poor little thing! They will catch you! hide where you will, they will catch you."

"I have not run away," said Fanny, gently.

The maniac shook her head. "Don't you scream as I did, my poor lamb, for it's no good; they care no more for screams and groans than for the whirring of the spindles; but the screams went into my own ears, and I have never got rid of them since. I still hear them, all night long, when it is moon-time. Poor, poor little girl!"

"Come, come, Sally—let her alone now, she is going to eat something."

And Mrs. Roberts completed the arrangements, upon which she had been occupied since they entered, by placing chairs at the table on which bread, butter, and cheese were placed.

Not even did the Deep Valley apprentice feel more disposed to do justice to these preparations than did Miss Brotherton and her old servant. They had tasted nothing since breakfast, and when a bowl of fresh milk was added to the bread and butter, Mary gratefully assured her entertainer that she considered it as the most delicious supper she had ever eaten.

"Now, that's different," said poor Sally, who had perched herself on a low stool close to Fanny Fletcher. "I never had any pretty creature like that, all clothed in heavenly trappings, giving *me* milk; but it will make no difference in the end—you must be dragged back again, poor little thing!"

"No, no—she won't be dragged back again," said Mrs. Roberts; "and there's a cup of milk for you—so, now, let the ladies eat in peace, Sally. You know it's time for you to be crawling home—the master will be here in no time, and may be he will be after asking how many stones you have picked up to-day, so you had better be off."

The docile creature immediately shuffled off her stool, and prepared to depart.

"I should like to hear her describe her own adventures, which you say she does so faithfully," said Miss Brotherton. "Do you think you could persuade her to repeat her story to us?"

"Yes, yes, ma'am; she will do that quick enough; it is just what she likes best," replied Mrs. Roberts; "except now and then, when she is moody. Now, Sally, if you will behave yourself like a sensible woman, you may sit down again, and tell the ladies how you ran away from the mill, and was caught and brought back again, and all the rest of it."

The little cripple's eyes twinkled, and a gleam of intelligence flashed across her countenance with a sort of Will-o'-the-wisp brightness, as she took the fragment of a hat from her closely-shorn gray head, and reseated herself.

"'Twas my knees as was the first of it," she began; "I couldn't bear it. The pain growed worse and worse, and my legs dipped down, and they strapped me harder and harder, and that was the reason that I couldn't bear it. So one day," she continued, in a deep, clear whisper, "one day, when the 'prentices, and overlookers,

and manager, and all was off for dinner, I stopped behind 'em, and nobody seed me—no, not one of 'em. And while they were at dinner, I slipped into the yard where the pigs bide, and then away again, all upon the sly, to the door where they takes the dirt out. I thought maybe I might have the bolts to pull, but not a bit of it—there it stood, wide open, with a barrow full of rubbish between the posts—that was fun!"

And here the poor creature laughed that dreadful laugh which none but maniacs utter.

"But the fun lasted longer than that," she went on; "it lasted while I creeped along for a mile or more among the bushes as grows so rank t'other side the mill; and there I laid down at last in the midst of 'em, 'cause I heard a noise; and what do you think it was? What d'ye think the poor cretur heard, with her heart galloping just at the bottom of her throat, for all the world like the flap—flap—flap of a fly-wheel?"

"Perhaps 'twas a dog barking, Sally," said Mrs. Roberts, humouring the maniac, as she made a pause.

"No! 'twas not a dog barking, nor it wasn't a wolf, nor it wasn't a tiger; but it was something ten million of times worser than either! It—was—the—'prentice-master!" replied Sally,

in a slow, deep whisper. "It was the divilish 'printice-master, with his eyes of fire, and his breath of flame. Oh-h! I feel him at my throat now!" and she clasped her withered neck with her pale thin hands, shuddering violently from head to foot.

"Speak soberly, Sally, and like a sensible body, or you must not go on, you know that," said Mrs. Roberts, interposing in a warning tone, which poor Sally seemed to understand; for though her breast still heaved with a panting movement, like one who had run a race, and was out of breath, she assumed an affected air of composure, putting her hands before her primly, and shutting her eyes.

"Yes, missis, I know that," she replied, sedately; "I know that very well, and we won't trouble Joe ploughman to help us home this time; but I may go on, if I speak sensible, and like a wise woman, as I am?"

The farmer's wife nodded assent, and Sally continued more quietly.

"It was the 'printice-master, and none but he as dragged me forth, head foremost, out of the bushes—very much like the butcher, you know, my dears, when he takes the little lamb's head between his two hard hands—I never sees that

up at Tom Blake's shambles, without thinking of it. So he dragged me back again—and then you may guess how the strap went! But think of me! think what a spirit I must have had in those days, my dears—will you believe that I made up my mind to start again, though I hadn't a bit of unbruised skin upon my body?—I did though. Oh, dear! oh, dear! how I used to hear the birds singing in my ears o' nights, when I laid down, and made believe to sleep! But I don't fancy it was sleep, not right wholesome sleep ever, as I got then; for I can mind now, yes I can, with all my moonshine, I can mind now, how I used to smell the grass, and see the dew shining, and hear the pretty sweet cows a mooing, and I all the while shut up in a stone prison-house—that was the divil tempting me, wasn't it? But I didn't start again for two whole years though,—'cause why, I never found no chance for it; and by that time my legs was shocking bad, and if it *was* the divil as made me run, he ought to have sent me a stick to help me—for, oh, dear! I crawled dreadful slow—and then——"

"Come, come, Sally," interrupted Mrs. Roberts, "I won't have all that at full length, or else we shall have you off again: make an end,

there's a fine woman. Tell the ladies about the shutting up, and then go home and to bed, for 'tis time."

Miss Brotherton ceased to wonder, as she had first done, at the chartered license which the crazy cripple seemed to enjoy, when she observed the perfect docility with which she obeyed every word and look of the farmer's wife. She now resumed her story, exactly at the word commanded.

"Yes, I was shut up, my dears—I shall have soon done now, for I am coming to the black gap, as I call it, and I always stops there—but where do you think they shut me up? In this room, or that room, or t'other room, perhaps? Not a bit of it. They shut me up in a little narrow place, not much bigger than a grave, and it was dark—dark—dark, all but one little narrow slip, and there was no light comed through that at first; but by and by, after I had been days and days locked in, I heard a horrid, horrid lumbering noise, and then I saw a flash of light through the narrow slip, for all the world like the light of a candle—and the light of a candle it was too; and what do you think it showed me? Crippled as I was, I managed to scramble high enough to peep—there was beams,

on bricks or something, and what do you think I saw?"

The poor creature began shaking again, but on Mrs. Roberts holding up her finger, she seemed to make a strong effort to control herself, and once more slipping off her stool, she drew close to Miss Brotherton, and, in a low rapid voice, hurried through the remainder of her narrative.

"I saw," said she, "the master's wife laid stone dead upon a truckle-bed, a'most as close to me as I to you—think of that! Stone dead! Stiffened, stark, and ghastly, and blue! There was a candle that flared full upon her dead face! but they as brought her was run away—they couldn't bear it, I'm sure they couldn't bear it, and I was left alone to look upon it, and I couldn't run away; but I could not bear it either, and then it was that I screamed—hush! I must not scream now, you know!"

Here she stopped, putting her hands before her eyes, and remaining perfectly still for a minute, and then added, with more composure—

"After that came the black gap, and I don't know any thing more about it; only that I watch the sun go to bed every night, and I have been going on praying for years and years, all the

time I have been growing into an old woman, that he would please not to wake me in the morning."

"Here's the master, Sally!" said Mrs. Roberts; "so take yourself off, the re's a good woman. Here's your mug of porridge; put on your hat steady, and wish the ladies a good night."

Again she was most docilely obeyed, and in another moment poor Sally was gone, and the hardworking master of the premises occupied her place. The situation and wants of his unexpected guests were speedily explained to him, and his best assistance as speedily promised. While he devoured a hasty supper, one of his farm-horses was put into the shafts of a jockey-cart, and in less than an hour after his return, the comforted party set out by the light of a friendly moon, and were safely jolted to the King's Head, without having been overtaken by the treacherous miller, who probably preferred sharing the jovial supper, in which his good friend Woodcomb indulged on this memorable evening, to forsaking it for the purpose of overtaking the ladies, from whom it was derived—as there seemed but little chance of drawing any thing more from the same source.

Great was the joy of Mrs. Prescot at seeing her guests return; for their long absence, together with the nature of the business on which they were engaged had caused the good woman to torment herself with many dark forbodings. Nevertheless, she was well prepared to receive them, and nothing was wanting that she could furnish towards refreshing the adventurers after their fatigue.

But, alas! it was only then—it was only after the anxiety, and the agitation of the enterprise were over, that poor Mary fully remembered how abortive that enterprise had been; and then she wept, wept bitterly, as she thought of the load of anguish she had to carry home to Michael's mother and brother. Yet as she listened to little Fanny's tearful narration of all that had passed between them, during the weeks they had worked together, she felt that when the first dreadful pang should be over, there would be something like consolation for them in listening to it also; and as she studied the delicate and expressive features of the pretty creature she had rescued, and watched the sort of timid, doubting hope that by degrees took place of the nervous, heart-struck look, that had been so painfully legible in her sweet face when first she

saw her, it was impossible not to feel that, while deploring the loss of one object of benevolence she had to rejoice for having found another.

Luckily for the respectability of their appearance, in setting forth on their homeward travels the following morning, the active Mrs. Prescot was enabled, by the aid of the heiress's magic pocket-book, to procure from a neighbour a suit of decent apparel for the little orphan. The same freely-flowing source supplied wherewithal to reward all the friendly offices performed by the host and hostess of the King's Head; and in addition, they were left in possession of a romance which was likely enough, from the frequency with which it was repeated, to furnish a legend to the little village to the end of time.

One single adventure occurred to Miss Brotherton on her way home, which though forming a very isolated episode in the history of her journey, shall be recounted, because the fact which it brought to her knowledge is one that well deserves publicity.

The heiress varied her road homewards, by driving through a village which, were it not infested by the plague-spot of a factory, might be considered as one of the most attractive in Derbyshire. At one point the road passes through a rocky defile of such wild beauty, that Mary,

who was equally unacquainted with fine scenery, and capable of enjoying it, called to the post-boy to stop, that she might get out and walk up the long ascent, in order the more thoroughly to enjoy the widely-spreading landscape it commanded. Neither of her companions accompanied her. Mrs. Tremlett consenting, nothing loth, to remain in the post-chaise, upon the steepness of the road being pointed out to her, while little Fanny, though in her heart longing to spring after her benefactress, replied to the observation, that she was not yet strong enough to climb, by a look that spoke more of gratitude than regret.

It was alone, therefore, that Mary Brotherton started forward, her active steps soon leaving the carriage behind; when cutting short the spiral ascent by making her way through the underwood which clothed the bank, she soon found herself high above the road, and on a spot of great beauty. After lingering here for a few minutes she proceeded, when hearing the ever attractive sound of rushing waters, she again stopped, and then, guided by her ear, followed where it led, till she reached an opening, not far from the high-road, but apart from it, where instead of the mountain cascade she had expected, a spectacle greeted her that for an in-

Last Scene of all

stant seemed to petrify every nerve, and the bounding elastic movement which had brought her within sight of it, was changed to the rigid stillness of marble. A man, almost ferocious in his aspect, from the squalid, unshorn, brutal negligence of decency which it betrayed, was supporting in his arms, and on his bosom, a boy of ten or eleven years old, whose ghastly countenance showed plainly that death was busy at his heart. Before the rock from whence flowed the gushing stream, whose sound had brought Miss Brotherton to the spot, stood what looked like the fragment of a rude pillar, and on this stone the father had rested the wasted form of his dying child. Before him stood a little girl gazing on the boy with a mixture of infant fear and sisterly love, as she tended a bowl, filled from the spring, to his lips.

"He is very ill!" said Mary, addressing the father, "can I go any where to get help for you?"

The man, who had the fragment of a pipe in his mouth, and who looked rather bewildered, and fiercely angry, than oppressed by sorrow, stared at her, but answered not a word.

"What is the matter with him?" said Miss Brotherton, addressing the little girl.

"He be worked down," replied the child sob-

bing. "We have been at long hours for four weeks, and Dick couldn't stand it—father have carried him to and from mill for a week—but he couldn't stand it. Mother said, when we started, that he looked as if he'd never come back alive; but he'd have to pay double fine if so be as father had left him to bide at home, so he carried him to mill; but though they strapped him, and strapped him, he couldn't stand to his work, and he have been lying in the mill-yard till father comed to take him."

This horrible statement was uttered amidst tears and sobs, but poor Mary lost not a word of it; and as her very soul sickened at the tale, she felt tempted to believe that she was doomed to witness every circumstance that could most painfully recall the source whence all her greatness flowed.

With clasped hands, and streaming eyes, she stood silently watching the gasping breath of this young victim of unnatural labour. The boy's eyes fixed themselves on the face of his little sister. He might be listening to her history of his early fate—or he might be consciously taking a last look at what he loved. In either case the effort demanded more strength than was left him — his eyes closed, a shivering movement passed through all his frame, and

then he became still. The quick, short, unequal heaving of the breast was seen no more, and Mary hid her eyes as the mysterious change, which no human being can gaze upon unmoved, came upon the stiffening features. It was rather instinct than feeling which prompted her, even at that awful moment, to proffer what she had learned to know would be felt as consolation, did one starving member of a family alone survive amidst the dying and the dead of a whole race. Without venturing again to look at the father and his son, she dropped into the bowl, which the little girl still held, what she hated to think would soon turn natural sorrow into unnatural forgetfulness of it: but she had no power to serve them more effectually, and hastily turning into the road, she awaited the slow arrival of the post-chaise in a state of mind which left no faculty at leisure to enjoy any longer the hills and valleys for whose sake she had left it.

From this time the journey homeward proceeded without accident or adventure of any kind, and Mary would probably have shared the pleasure so energetically expressed by Mrs. Tremlett at being restored to the luxurious tranquillity of Millford Park, had not the heavy news she carried to the poor Armstrongs made her dread the day that would follow her reaching it.

But how she got through that painful day, and all that resulted from it—how little Fanny Fletcher fared in her new and most strange home, and whether her patroness had most reason to bless or deplore the sudden movement which had caused her to hazard the blending thus the destiny of one so utterly unknown with her own, must all be reserved for future narration, as the adventures of Michael Armstrong, of necessity, draw the pen of his historian elsewhere.

CHAPTER III.

The narrative returns to its hero—And relates why and wherefore he was kept alive—The boy grows tall, and takes to thinking.

THE answer which Fanny Fletcher had received to her inquiries concerning Michael was as false as it was heedless. The little fellow who gave it had no intention of uttering what was untrue: he believed that the boy she inquired for was dead—so many had died, and been borne from the wretched garret where he had himself lain, battling with the fever, sometimes delirious, and sometimes asleep, that it was no great wonder he should blunder. But Michael Armstrong was not dead, though the state in which the malady left him was such, that for weeks the surly old woman, hired to supply the place of Mrs. Poulet, muttered curses on him for not being in a state to be quietly buried out of the way, like the rest.

It was just five days after Fanny Fletcher

left the Deep Valley Mills, in company with Miss Brotherton, that Michael waked from that first sound healing sleep, which often announces the conquest of life over death, after a hard-fought struggle between them.

The little fellow raised himself upright on his straw pallet, and for a minute or two looked about him to make himself quite sure where he was; for so heavy had been his sleep that it was not immediately his senses could recover their usual powers of perception. But only too soon, alas! he made it all out. He was still in that foul den of misery and filth; and the first impulse of his fully-recovered intellect was to utter a bitter expression of regret that his life had been spared for further suffering, while so many had been mercifully permitted to sink into their peaceful graves. But even as he breathed the words, he repented of them. The image of his mother seemed to rise before him—he remembered that she had bade him ever to trust in God, and let no cause tempt him to take his name in vain. The quiet eye of his much-enduring brother rose to his memory, as he had seen it a thousand times fixed upon him, while he enjoined patience and submission for their dear mother's sake; and the more recently-heard precepts of little Fanny, all preaching the

same righteous but hard lesson, came, in their soft, pleading, innocent tone, to give him strength to bear. Michael crossed his emaciated hands upon his breast, and murmured "God forgive me!"—then dropping again into a gentle sleep, awoke not till the old woman shook him rudely, rather for the gratification of her curiosity, than in performance of her duty, in order to see whether the "wiry, hard-skinned little varment wasn't dead at last."

She started with a feeling very like terror, when the boy, opening his large eyes upon her, asked her to please to be so kind as to give him a drink of water.

"What, then!—you don't mean to die after all? If you bean't born to be hanged, it's a mystery. Water?—if you haven't got summut in it after lying this fashion, the Lord knows how long, you'll balk the hangman at last!" And with these words the crabbed crone retreated, hastening, with the consciousness of having something wonderful to tell, into the presence of Mr. Woodcomb.

"There's a boy, sir, as have been lying a dying a'most ever since I comed, as is actually coming to now; not but what he must still be within an inch of the grave, seeing what he has gone

through—and he looks for all the world as if he had been buried and dug up again. Howsomever I don't think but what he might come through, if so be as you thought it worth while to give him food. That sort of sleep as I waked him out of shows plain enough as the fever is gone; and then you know, sir, as kitchen physic is all the cretur's wants, perhaps, for the sake of preventing the burying beginning again, your honour might think it was as well to give him a little broth, and meat, too, after a bit, for he won't do without it, that's certain."

"I had clean forgot that there was one left up there, Molly," replied the superintendent; "but in Heaven's name let him be fed, woman—I wouldn't have to bury any more of 'em just now, for ever so—he'll come round again, I suppose, before it's very long? We are still very short of piecers, and it's as well to keep him alive, you know, as to go after another."

"As for that, sir," replied the old woman, "it won't be to-morrow, nor next day, either, as he'll pay for his salt; I'll tell you that beforehand. So you had best please to make up your mind at once about the keeping him alive. There's nothing will do it but giving him a'most a bellyful every day, and maybe a little fresh air into the

bargain, I'm thinking, seeing the time he's laid stewing up there, with such lots dying all round him."

"If it wasn't for the having to open ground for him again, I'd be hanged, drawn, and quartered, before I'd trouble myself about what sort of air a 'prentice had to breathe. Howsomever, I have got my own reasons for not choosing to trouble the parson again, nor yet for doing the job without him. So cram the brat as much as you like—I suppose my leavings is good enough for him?"

"Please, master, not to talk of my liking to cram 'prentice brats," retorted Molly. "Often and often, as I've been back and forward here, for one job or another, nobody ever saw me trying to pilfer anything for their starving stomachs, the low creturs! I despises 'em too much. But I knows what will save life, and what will lose it, better, maybe, than most folks, and so now you may do just as you please, without putting it upon my likes or dislikes."

"Don't be so frumpish, Molly Bing," replied Mr. Woodcomb, laughing, "there's nobody going to charge you with being such a fool as to make a pet of a factory 'prentice while there's a puppy-dog to be had for love or money. Don't you be scared at any such notion as that, for I

knows ye a deal better, old woman, than to put any such affront upon ye. You just stop the creature from dying, if you can, for that will suit me a deal best just now."

The will of Mr. Woodcomb, thus clearly expressed, was acted upon with very implicit obedience, the consequence of which was, that Michael Armstrong was not only saved from death, but his constitution greatly benefited. Molly Bing had pledged her judgment upon the result of his case, and, in order to prove it correct, she contrived that he should swallow about ten times as much nourishment as fell to the share of any other child in the mill. He had grown surprisingly during the period of his confinement, and this gave so lengthy a look to his thin person, that Molly more than once fancied the audacious little villain would give her the lie at last: so she not only fed him, but got leave for him to clean out the pig-styes, scrape up the filth from the yard, and sundry other jobs of the same description; all of which, however unsavoury in their nature, bore, as the sharp-witted old woman well knew, the balm of health in every movement they enforced, compared to the monotonous and grinding slavery of the mill. But in the course of a month or two another glorious proof of England's prosperity reached the

Deep Valley, in the shape of a large order, and Mr. Elgood Sharpton, in communicating the cheering intelligence to his manager, enforced the necessity of strenuous exertion in the execution of it, by telling him that, sick or well, the children must work long hours, and that it was far better that they should a *little* overwork the hands, than run any risk of disappointing so valuable a customer.

In consequence of these instructions, Michael was withdrawn from his out-door labours, and once more made to follow the mules. It was then, and then only, that he discovered the heavy loss he had sustained by the departure of Fanny. While employed upon the out-of-door tasks assigned to him by the commands of Molly Bing, he had been strictly enjoined never to speak to any of the apprentices who might chance to pass while he was at work. His meals were eaten in Mr. Woodcomb's kitchen, and the place assigned for his lodging by night was a sort of closet that opened from it. No day, no hour had passed, unless in sleep, since he recovered his senses, without his thinking of her. At the risk, or rather with the certainty of cuffs and hard words, no footfall had ever passed within his hearing without causing him to turn his head to reconnoitre; and much as he preferred the labour on

which he was now employed to that of the mill, he would willingly, nay joyfully, have exchanged it in the hope of again seeing his little friend. It was therefore with a feeling of gladness, instead of regret, that he received orders to turn into the factory.

"That is queer!" thought the little fellow, as he bounded to obey the command, with the double energy of recovered health, and awakened hope; "it is queer for me to feel glad that I am going back to the factory!"

As it happened, he was marshalled into the same room in which he had worked before his illness—but alas! when he turned his eyes to the spot which Fanny had formerly occupied near him, a singularly ill-favoured boy met his gaze, instead of the pretty creature he sought for. This was a death-blow to the joy which a few minutes before had given him a gait and an expression of countenance so unwonted in a factory-boy returning to his well-known sufferings. Nevertheless, though a tear blinded the eyes which at length settled reluctantly on the broken threads which awaited his fingers, he remembered that the factory had seven floors, and cruel as it was to lose the pleasure of giving his little friend a look or a word as they each paced their weary walk, he still thought he

might get a sight of her at their dismal meals, and fancied that he should not greatly regret exchanging scraps of wholesome meat, for musty oatmeal, provided Fanny Fletcher was by to tell him not to mind it. But the musty oatmeal came all too soon, for no word or look of Fanny's came with it; nor did any uncertainty long remain, on which to hang a lingering hope that some unfinished task detained her in the mill, and that he should see her soon. His first question, whispered to the girl who sat beside him, brought forth the history of Fanny's wonderful departure, at as full length as the time and place would permit. At first he listened to it with incredulity. It seemed, he thought, like a story made up to deceive him for fun; and little as the blighted young spirits of that sad fraternity were given to jesting, Michael clung to the belief that such was the case, as long as the meal lasted. But, as usual, a few minutes followed, during which they were left alone—an indulgence which necessarily arose from the fact, that even the niggardly allowance of time awarded by the regulations of Mr. Elgood Sharpton for their meals, was more than the famished children required for devouring the scanty portion set before them. No sooner had Mr. Poulet withdrawn himself, after witnessing the orderly

consumption by each of the allotted morsel, than such of the miserable crew as had survived the pestilence, and remembered the close alliance between Michael and the heroine of the marvellous tale which was still in every mouth, all rushed together towards him for the purpose of recounting it. Notwithstanding the confusion of tongues, their noisy testimony was too consistent to admit of doubt, and Michael remained with the astounding belief that his little friend was taken away to be made a great lady of.

The heart of Michael Armstrong proved itself to be a very generous one on this occasion.

"Some natural tears he shed, but wiped them soon,"

as he remembered that the more miserable the situation in which he was left, the more he ought to rejoice that Fanny had been taken from it. And he did rejoice; truly, sincerely, and at the very bottom of his heart did he rejoice. As day after day the hateful routine of unvarying suffering again laid its grasp upon his existence, with a power as irresistible as that of the vast engine which within those prison-walls seemed "lord of all," the generous heart of Michael felt thankful that Fanny Fletcher shared it no longer. It had been quite in vain that he had laboured to persuade himself, while listening to the reasonings of his little friend, that they ought mutually to

rejoice in the probability of each other's death. Though he had allowed that as far as he was himself concerned he might easily be brought to think that it would be a comfort to die, he could never reach the pitch of sublimity necessary to form the wish that Fanny might die before him. But now it was evident that this weakness, which had more than once caused his little monitress to shake her head, and say that he did not love her as well as she loved him, it was now quite evident that it was no selfish motive which had caused it.

By degrees this truly noble feeling, this generous power of living, as it were, in the prosperity of another, so strengthened the character of the boy, as perfectly to save him from that worst result of youthful suffering, a reckless, desperate despair, which by destroying hope, that beautiful mainspring of all our best actions, leaves the poor spiritless machine alive only to the wretched consciousness of its capacity for pain. It is, beyond all question, this bitter hopelessness which deteriorates in so remarkable a manner the moral character of operatives under the present factory system. In no other situation, excepting only that of slaves purchased and paid for like an ox, or an ass, is the destiny of a human being placed so wholly and completely

beyond the reach of his own control. He is, as Wordsworth truly says,

> "A slave to whom release comes not,
> And cannot come."

In no other situation do labouring men, women, and children feel and know that unless they submit in all things to the behests of their employer, they must die—and that too by a process ten thousand times worse than either the hangman's cord, or the headsman's axe—they must die the death of famine. If their lingering hours of labour be prolonged beyond the stipulated time for which they are paid, they cannot turn and say, "I will not, for it is not in the bond," for the ready answer is, "*Go.* We employ none who make conditions with us." And where are they to go? To the parish officers? As ready an answer meets them there: "*Go.* We relieve none who can get work and refuse it." If they are fined, however unjustly, however arbitrarily, if the iniquitous *truck* system be resorted to for payment of wages, instead of money, if their women be insulted, or their children crippled, and remonstrance follow, the same death-dooming reply awaits them: "*Go.* We employ no grumblers here."

Then to what quarter can they look with hope? Where are they to find that only elixir

by which human strength is mercifully made for ever equal to sustain human suffering ? The sparkling draught is not for them ! The factory operative alone, of all to whom God has given the power of thought, is denied the delicious privilege of hope. It is this which degrades their nature : it is this which from youth to age renders one ruinous hour of brutal debauchery more precious than all that steadfast sober industry can promise or bestow.

It was long, very long, ere this intellectual blight, this smothering mildew of the soul, fell upon Michael, for he seemed to possess a sort of twofold existence, "the worser half of it" being his poor self, while the better was found in the happy destiny of Fanny. Countless were the miles that he walked backwards and forwards before the mules, during which he cheered his fancy by painting her in the midst of liberty and green fields. Sometimes he thought that, if she were rich, she would remember all he had told her about his mother and Edward—that she would find them out—would take compassion on their poverty—would talk of him—would soothe and comfort them.

All this may seem, to happier beings, but a frail support, under incessant labour, accompanied by every species of privation : yet it did

Michael service—it kept his faculties alive: for it gave a theme, and a pleasant one, on which to fix his thoughts, and half the tedium of his own sad life was forgotten as he meditated on the probable happiness of hers.

Sometimes, it must be owned—though he always told himself that such thoughts were nonsense,—ideas would suggest themselves less abstractedly disinterested: for it would now and then come into his head that Fanny Fletcher knew where Sir Matthew had sent him, if nobody else did; and that, perhaps, if she grew to be a great girl, with power to do what she liked, she might think of him, and try to do something to rescue him. Vague as was this notion, vague as he himself felt it to be, it was a blessing to him. When such thoughts arose, his bodily strength seemed to revive, his aching knees no longer bent under him, his gait was no longer that of an ordinary factory-child, the energy of his mind lent itself to his limbs; and, wearily as he stretched himself upon his bed of straw, and long and lanky as his half-starved person grew, Michael Armstrong did not become a cripple.

But years wore away, and the stout-hearted young prisoner of the Deep Valley began again to think that he had better have died of the fever than have lived so long, hoping for some

happy chance to set him free, and hoping for ever and for ever in vain.

"I am a fool," argued Michael at fourteen,—"I am a fool for thinking so very much of one who it is quite plain has never thought of me—nor of mother—nor of my poor Edward either; she never gave a thought to either of us! I was a fool to dream it! The fine folks that carried her away took her far enough from sight and sound of factory-people. And who can blame her if she never turned her head back again to inquire about any of them? Poor little Fanny! She was very kind to me once—and she was the very prettiest little girl that ever I happened to see. But other people may have found that out by this time, as well as I. Fanny Fletcher is a whole year older than me! I will try with all my might and main never to think of her any more!"

This resolution was not very steadily adhered to; but the struggle to do it, which was perfectly sincere, made the poor boy moody and more miserable than ever. His dreams perpetually represented to him his mother and helpless brother, suffering from some unkindness from Fanny, whom he saw superlatively beautiful, and superlatively rich, but more superlatively hard-hearted still. These nervous and irritating visitations

brought his mother and brother so vividly before him, that for weeks he could never, whether waking or sleeping, get them out of his head. He fancied himself again running at full speed from Dowling Lodge, with Martha's basket on his arm; his mother's little room, decent and orderly in spite of poverty, came back upon his mind as if he had left it but yesterday. He saw the soft expression of her faded countenance, and felt the welcome of her fond embrace.

"Oh, fool! oh, proud and wicked fool!" he murmured to his tear-stained pillow, as these and a thousand other tender recollections pressed upon him. "Why could I not endure the tyrant's cruelty? I might have kissed her now! I might have comforted poor Teddy!" The sound of his own voice as he pronounced this dear familiar name, though in a whisper too low to awaken the weary sleepers round him, wrung his very heart by the vivid recollections which it brought, and, though he was now beyond fourteen years old, he cried himself to sleep.

Fitful and feverish were the transitions of his mind at this period. Sometimes he persuaded himself that his mother was no more, that the loss of him had broken her heart, and that she had died, believing him to have gone before her. At other times it was Edward whom he wept as

dead. His shattered health, his feeble limbs were, as he thought, sure evidence that nature meant him not to struggle long against the misery of his lot, and there were moments in which this persuasion even soothed him.

"Sweet fellow!" thought he. "How calm and beautiful he must have looked in death! Even in suffering, even in agony, his countenance was lovely—so patient, and so heavenly mild! Better, far better he should die than live a factory-boy like me!"

And then again his mood would change, and he had for ever before him images of the most fearful destitution—his mother starving, and Edward slowly perishing beside her, because *he* had been too proud and too impatient to endure sundry buffetings and other indignities, which, when put in competition with the thought of having injured them, dwindled into petty injuries, which he deserved eternal shame for shrinking from.

Dreadful were the hours he thus spent! And fearful to think of was the hopeless, helpless, joyless, comfortless existence by which he held to earth! His very soul sickened as he looked around him, and read in every withered, melancholy face the history of blasted youth, and the prophecy of premature death.

But there are spirits which sorrow and suffering cannot quench, and Michael Armstrong's was one of them. Nature and accident together had been stronger than the tendency of his employment to cripple his limbs, and he was neither deformed nor stunted. This happy exemption from the common lot was doubtless greatly owing to the pertinacity of Molly Bing in proving to Messrs. Woodcomb and Poulet that she was no fool, and knew well enough what she was about. This steadfastness on her part, acting in unison with the superintendent's judicious objections to Michael's being buried at that particular time, had certainly given a very critical and efficient impulse to the vigour of a frame of great natural strength and comeliness. The energetic self-sustaining soul within it had also much to do in defying the paralyzing influence of his miserable situation. It was rarely that Michael could be seen to drag his limbs along, even in the last hours of long-protracted labour, with the same crippled, dipping gait as his companions. A broken-spirited child, when his knees are aching, permits them to bend under him; and not one in fifty, perhaps, of the half-starved, over-worked apprentices of the Deep Valley reached the term of their captivity without carrying away with them some species of bodily

weakness or deformity. But, let the reason be what it might, Michael was saved from this; and, though exhibiting a fabric composed of little besides skin, bone, and sinew, he was at the age of fourteen years and six months both tall and straight.

But it seemed as if the inward strength of mental suffering kept pace with this vigour of frame; for day by day the bitter consciousness of his own wretched and degraded state increased upon him—and day by day his swelling heart grew more indignant as he looked around him, and watched the exercise of lawless power and coward tyranny upon his miserable companions.

It was after a peculiarly hateful display of this power, by an act of insult too disgusting to relate, upon the unresisting person of a little fellow who seemed crawling (only too slowly!) to the grave, that Michael, when every other sufferer in the chamber was fast asleep, set himself to meditate gravely and deliberately upon his own situation. He had that day been so near trying the power of his bony arms, by flying at the throat of the ruffian who had so revoltingly outraged his companion, that with more than boyish judgment he became conscious of the growing danger that beset him. Though he had felt almost to suffocation the boiling rage

which nothing but injustice and the pitiful abuse of adventitious power can generate, he was not such a Quixote as to hope that his arm could effectually redress the wrongs he witnessed, yet he thought, with a sort of trembling exultation, that, if he *had* seized the craven overlooker, as he kicked from him the helpless object of his tyranny, he might have held him with a grasp that would have stopped his breath for ever!

It was a horrid and a murderous thought! and poor Michael, once the gentlest, fondest little heart that ever nestled to a mother's bosom, did penance for it by a pang of self-condemnation that made him grind his teeth in agony. Yet even then the goaded spirit seemed to rise in rebellion against its own remorse.

"I cannot bear it!" he exclaimed, in smothered accents, as he turned his face towards his bed of straw. "I know I cannot bear it long! I have seen two attempting to escape, who have been brought back to frightful tortures—to I know not what! A solitary cell? the whip? the knotted thong? What matters? Would they could slaughter me at once! All would be over then."

For a long still hour of that feverish night the boy lay sleepless. A terrible conviction that there was something within him which might

prove stronger than himself—stronger than all his mother's precepts, and the holy fear of God which they had left upon his mind—made him feel sick with horror, and shudder in abhorrence of his own wickedness. He prayed to God to give him power to turn his thoughts from this; and, soothed to calmness by the healing act, he meditated without passion, and with great acuteness for his years, upon the probable result of attempting to escape.

The difficulties of the enterprise were greater than any can imagine who know not the locality, and the intricate network of security, which surround the imprisoned apprentices of Deep Valley on all sides. Of this the elder children, and the few who lived to approach their majority, were by no means ignorant. Considerable pains were indeed taken to impress upon their minds the certainty of their being caught if they succeeded in clearing the walls; together with the important fact that, as apprentices, it was illegal to assist them in running away from their master, and that it was the duty of every justice of peace to assist in securing and sending them back to complete the term fixed in their indentures.

All this Michael knew perfectly well: neither was he at all sanguine in his hope of avoiding

the toils from which he had never heard that any had escaped. Yet he determined to make the attempt, assuring himself that no change in the treatment he received could render him more miserable, and sincerely thinking that it would be better and safer for him should the failure of this desperate attempt lead to such a degree of restraint as would render the yielding to such violence of emotion, as had that day seized upon him, impossible.

Having come to this conclusion, and firmly pledged his young spirit to the attempt, his feverish restlessness subsided, and he dropped asleep.

The waking of the next morning was unlike any he had ever known before. He no longer felt as one among a miserable crew, sharing in common with them starvation, labour, and indignity; he felt himself to be one alone, and apart from all. He was on the eve of doing that which would involve him in difficulties and dangers altogether new and strange to him, and the only termination he could be really said to expect was the being dragged back to his prison to suffer all that it was in the power of his tyrants to inflict. These were strange materials for meditation, which was decidedly agreeable; yet such Michael felt it to be, in spite of reason.

A sensation of active, dauntless courage swelled his breast, which, with all the danger it threatened, was well worth the heavy monotony of his ordinary existence. At times, too, a gleam of hope would dart across the stern and steady gloom of the prospect; and, during the moment that the flash lasted, he saw himself restored to his mother and Edward. He could hardly be said to hope this, yet the feeling that it was possible sufficed to sustain his spirits through the days and nights which preceded the attempt.

It was exactly by the same exit that poor crazy Sally had made use of some fifty years before that Michael determined to leave the premises. The month or two during which he had been employed in cleaning the yard and its appurtenances had made him thoroughly well acquainted with the outward door, and also with the region immediately beyond it, for it was thither that he was accustomed to convey all the rubbish which it was his office to remove—an office which might have been attended with some danger of the escape of him who performed it, had not those in authority taken care to inform him that no celerity of step could avail against the watchfulness of certain eyes about the factory, which were always on the alert to reconnoitre that door, and never far distant from the

commodious windows which gave them power to do so.

Poor Sally had found this but too surely in making her attempts, and Michael had more than once listened to the merry tradition, which was a favourite story with the overlookers, of how the silly girl had run in full sight of a dozen watchful eyes, till her strength failed, and she sank down among the bushes and was taken, like a bird that, having been long confined, has no strength of wing left to bear him beyond reach of the first hand extended to recapture him.

Yet this open postern was the only one by which it was possible to pass; but the very extremity of the danger of passing it made the attempt easy; for, though it was always carefully locked at night, and the key placed, together with those of every external door on the premises, under the pillow of Mr. Woodcomb, the manager had more than once seen a miserable little head peeping through it when left open for the passage of the wheelbarrow, without testifying the least alarm.

The time chosen by Michael for passing this terrible door was that during which the dirty herd were commanded to expose their faces and hands for a short moment to such cleansing as

might be obtained in a huge trough, in company with a score or two of competitors. It was constantly a moment of great noise, bustle, and hustling; and it was in the midst of this that the young adventurer contrived, unobserved, to push back the only bolt which secured the door during the day, leaving it in a position to yield noiselessly to a very slight touch. At the sound of a bell, which rang about ten minutes after the children were turned out into the court to wash themselves, the whole troop hurried back again to the apprentice-house for their breakfast. It was then that Michael, often the last to finish the too-short operation of washing, remained for a moment behind the rest, and, in that moment, opening the door just wide enough for his slender figure to pass, he slipped through, and closed it after him.

The interval which elapsed before his departure was suspected certainly did not exceed two minutes; and, before the expiration of ten, the fact was completely ascertained and known to nearly every inmate of the mill.

Mr. Poulet's second wife, to whom he had then been married about three years, was in appearance the very reverse of the first, being as remarkably small as the other was large. But what she wanted in muscle was made up in

watchfulness. Nothing escaped her restless and malignant little eyes, and, either from the incessant danger of her spying sharpness, or the propensity of the human mind to think present suffering worse than every other, there were many who declared they would be glad to have her brutal predecessor back again. It was this woman who first descried the absence of Michael from the board.

"Hollo! where is No. 57?" she cried.

No one could answer; and No. 57 was sought for in vain from one end of the premises to the other.

"He is gone through the yard-door!" proclaimed the active and intelligent Mrs. Poulet, after discovering that the bolt was withdrawn. "Off with you, you stupid old fool!" she added, addressing her husband; "what d'ye stand staring there for? If you had the wit of a jackass, you might trace him by his feet on the dew—for there are the marks plain enough to anybody that has sense enough to look for 'em."

And so in truth there were. A continuous track of footmarks were easily traced from the door to the steep bank behind the factory, where they were lost in the covert of bushes which had of late years been coaxed to clothe its sides for the purpose of furnishing fagots. That some

one had recently broken through these bushes was equally evident, from many boughs having been torn, and the soil beneath them trampled. This was enough to direct the pursuit, with so much certainty of being right, that Mr. Woodcomb laughed as he gave the orders for it.

"The bushes last for about half a mile," said he, "and then he must take over the hills, of course. Fine fellow, isn't he? It will be mighty hard to take him again, won't it? There's only three justices of peace for him to be handed to, and only every man he meets ready to introduce him. The worst misfortune is, that I don't quite see where he is to get his dinner."

Two stout overlookers started accordingly upon the track thus easily hit upon, and Mr. Woodcomb awaited the result of their exertions without the slightest anxiety or any irritation of nerves whatever; albeit he knew that, favourite as he was, he might run no small risk of losing his place, should one of the apprentices really escape—but the thing was impossible; no one could live without eating, not even one who had served his apprenticeship to starving as well as piecing at the Deep Valley Mill. So Mr. Woodcomb slept soundly, although in ignorance of the fact that Michael Armstrong was already within a few feet of his premises.

CHAPTER IV.

A dismal enterprise, and its melancholy result — Martha Dowling punished more severely than she deserved—Very wild projects conceived by Miss Brotherton, and speedily put in execution.

It is now necessary that the narrative should briefly return to the period of Miss Brotherton's arrival at Milford Park, after her unsuccessful expedition in pursuit of Michael.

There was no needless delay between this return to her home and the communication to Mrs. Armstrong and Edward of the dismal news of which she was the bearer; nor was there any consultation, on this occasion, concerning the mode of her reaching Hoxley-lane. Poor Mary had greatly advanced in independence of spirit within the last few months; and, had she encountered all the military quartered within twenty miles, with the Dowling family marching in procession at their head, she would have quietly driven through them all, with the carriage-windows up, perhaps, but with no greater

precaution—except, indeed, an order to the coachman to drive on without stopping, let them meet who they would.

The carriage was at the door the morning after their return, and Miss Brotherton had not yet named her intended expedition to Mrs. Tremlett.

"You are going out without me, my dear?" said the old lady, on hearing it announced.

"I am going to the widow Armstrong's, dear nurse," replied the heiress. "Your presence cannot help me through this dreaded visit. Then why should I make you share the pain of it?"

"Why? my dear! because I am of no earthly use, and had better die at once if I cannot be of some little comfort to you at such a time as this. Why, don't I know all about it, and how you must feel at this very moment, just as well as you do yourself, Mary? Sure it was a foolish notion to leave me here enjoying the arm-chair, and the footstool, and the flowers, while you are having your heart broken by telling that poor pale body that the child she loved so dearly is dead and gone for ever."

"If you could save either her or me a pang, nurse Tremlett, I would not thus have spared you," replied Miss Brotherton. "However, you

shall go with me, dear friend. It is quite like yourself to wish it—and, in truth, I might have guessed that you could not have remained easy and quiet at home while I was so engaged. And poor Fanny!—I have left her very busy with Martin, assisting in arranging the little room I have assigned her near my own. Shall we tell her where we are going, in case she should come in here to look for us?"

"My dear Mary! if you will take my advice, you will let her go too. If you do not, the whole of this terrible talk will have to begin all over again: for, of course, when Mrs. Armstrong hears that you have got with you the only person who can tell anything about her boy, she will be restless and anxious to see her—and then won't it be all over again, Mary?"

"It will, indeed, dear nurse! You are very right, and very wise in this. She shall go with us, poor child. Though it will be a dreadful task for her!" replied Mary.

"And you would rather take it, dear, all on your own shoulders? I do not doubt that—only you don't know how to manage it," replied Mrs. Tremlett. "But there is another thing, Mary, that I have been thinking of," continued the kind-hearted old woman; "and that is the other poor boy. I'll engage to say he has

never missed school for an hour, after what you said to him about exerting himself. I saw how he took it; and, therefore, you may depend upon it that he is at the schoolhouse now. Then just think, my dear, what his going home will be after you have told all! Poor creatures! It makes one's heart sick to fancy it! If I were you, Mary, I would send for him, tell him everything at once, and then take him home to his mother."

Miss Brotherton instantly rose and rang the bell.

"Do not say you are of no use, my dear good creature!" said she. "How infinitely better this will be than the hurried, thoughtless plan which I had sketched!"

A message was accordingly despatched to the schoolhouse to summon Edward Armstrong, and in a few minutes he stood before them.

Most true is it that there is something holy and imposing in the presence of sorrow. It would be difficult to imagine any *entrée* into the boudoir of Miss Brotherton which would have inspired a feeling both in her and her friend so nearly approaching awe as did that of Edward Armstrong.

"There is no need to tell him, poor fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Tremlett, mournfully shaking her

head, as she saw the sudden and eloquent change in Edward's countenance the moment he looked in the face of Miss Brotherton. "There is no need to tell him! He knows it all already?"

"He is dead, then!" said the boy, his pale lips parting, as it seemed, with difficulty, to pronounce the words; "Please, ma'am, let me go away."

He looked as if he were unable to sustain himself; and Mary, really fearing he might fall, started from her seat, and, throwing her arms round him, almost carried him to the sofa.

"No, no, my poor Edward!" she said, "do not go away. Stay with those who love and pity you! Poor Michael *is* dead, Edward, and we must all try to support your mother under the dreadful news."

"How do you know he is dead?" cried Edward, starting up, and looking almost sternly at his benefactress. "How do you know that they have not hid him away where you cannot find him, that they may torture him, and work him to the bone, when there is nobody by to see?"

"I know that he is dead but too well, Edward," replied Mary, gently. "I have brought home with me a little girl who worked in the

same factory, and who knew him well. He died of an infectious fever that killed many, many more. I am going to take this little girl with me to your mother, Edward, that she may question her, if she wishes it, about poor Michael, and I wish you to go with us, my dear boy: it is better that your poor mother should have you with her."

"You are going to tell mother?" said the boy, with a shudder.

"Yes, Edward!—it must be done, and the sooner it is over the better. Your mother is a good woman and a pious Christian, my dear boy. She will know and feel that all that can befall her is the will of God; and, when she remembers this, she will rise above her sorrow, and, thinking of the better world hereafter, will be able to say, 'His will be done!'"

"Yes, ma'am—if it does not kill her first," answered Edward.

"Indeed, I think a great deal will depend on you, dear Edward, as to her manner of bearing it. If she sees you sink, be sure she will sink too; but if you make her feel that she has still a beloved child to live for, to whom life may yet be a blessing, she will cease to repine for the loss of one child, for the sake of making the other happy."

Edward slowly and silently shook his head; but, after the melancholy silence of a minute or two, he said, "I will do my best, ma'am."

The scene which followed beside the bed of the poor widow was one of such deep but patient sorrow as left an impression never to be forgotten on the minds of those who witnessed it. Mary's counsel had not been thrown away upon Edward. The boy displayed both a delicacy and firmness of character beyond his years and above his education. No ordinary topics of consolation were clumsily uttered to redeem his pledge to Mary, nor did he affect a stoical indifference which he could not feel; but with gentle endearments he drew the mourning mother to think of him, and there was healing, as well as agony, in the tears she shed upon his bosom.

Of all this Fanny was a silent but deeply-moved spectator. The widow gave her one earnest look when Mary said, "This little girl was the last person who spoke to Michael before he was laid on the sick bed from whence he never rose, and she seems to have loved him dearly."

One long earnest look was turned upon her when this was said, but no word was spoken to her, for the time was not yet come when the

bereaved mother could seek comfort in anything. Nevertheless, when Miss Brotherton rose to go, and, pressing the hand of the poor sufferer in her own, promised to pay her another visit soon, Mrs. Armstrong murmured in her ear, "I should like to see that little girl again, when I can bear to name him." Mary nodded her assent, and left the mother and son to exchange thoughts and feelings which, when deep and genuine, must ever be held sacred from every unkindred eye.

Most watchfully did Mary attend to this poor pensioner; and many were the hours during which she sat reading the book of life beside her bed. By degrees, too, the bereaved mother did bear to name her lost darling to Fanny Fletcher; and, having once listened to the sweet tones of her gentle voice, as she related all she had heard him say, all he had seemed to feel, and all he had seemed to think, the poor woman grew so enamoured of the uneventful tale, that she wearied not of making her repeat it. For days together Fanny would beg to be left beside her, while Edward resumed his place in the school; and Miss Brotherton often thought, when she drove to Hoxley-lane in the evenings, to bring back her little *protégée*, that she had never chanced to witness so pretty a specimen of female ten-

derness and pity as this lovely little girl ex-exhibited while ministering to the poor crippled woman, whose only claim upon her love was that she wanted it—a species of claim, by the by, that is very rarely made in vain upon any uncorrupted female heart.

With every want prevented, soothed by the most generous kindness, attended with the most watchful love, and cheered by a greater appearance of reviving health in the boy that she had thought crippled for life, than she had ever ventured to hope for, it might have been expected that the widow Armstrong would, in some degree, have forgotten past sufferings, and have once more looked forward with hope. But, no, it could not be! This last, this heaviest of all her sorrows came too late to be wrestled with, as others had been; and, though her meek nature seemed so peacefully resigned that there was more pleasure than pain in watching over her, she was, in truth, dying of a worn-out spirit and a broken heart.

By some means or other, the news that little Michael Armstrong was dead reached Dowling Lodge. Sir Matthew knit his brows—wondered how the devil anybody could have got tidings of him—but said nothing. To all the rest of the family, save one, the intelligence was too unim-

portant to be listened to at all; but to that one, to the already conscience-stricken and repentant Martha, it was a heavy blow! Most miserable, indeed, had been her state of mind for the last few months: from the day of her painful, but useless visit to Miss Brotherton, her eyes had been, in a great degree, opened to the hard and avaricious nature of her father's character. Like a person excluded from the light of the sun, and seeing only by the delusive glare of an unsteady lamp, Martha had passed her whole life in mistaking the nature and the value of almost every object around her. The language of Mary Brotherton had shot with a painful and unwelcome brightness upon the dim and uncertain twilight of her moral perceptions; and the unhappy girl learned to know that the only being who had ever seemed to love her, or whom she had ever ventured to love, was one that her better reason shrunk from, and her sober judgment condemned.

Yet still he was her father, and still she loved him; and gladly, joyfully would she have given her young life, could she thereby have changed his love of gold for love of mercy. Sometimes she thought that time and age would teach him the hollowness of his present pursuits; and that if she never left him, but ever stood ready at

his side to watch some favourable moment, she might have the surpassing joy of seeing his heart open to the truth, and in a state to permit her helping to lead him to efficient repentance, and the all-merciful forgiveness of God. It was impossible but that such thoughts and feelings must separate her, more than ever, from the rest of her family, and she had already pretty generally received the epithet of *methodistical* from the whole neighbourhood; but she hailed it as a blessing, and without a shadow of religious enthusiasm, beyond what was almost inevitable under the circumstances, and with no sectarian views or notions whatever, poor Martha gladly sheltered herself under the imputation of both in order to avoid joining in scenes of amusement for which she had no relish.

In such a state of mind it was natural enough that Martha should deem a visit to the bereaved mother a penance which it was her duty to perform (though it was more painful to her, perhaps, than almost any other to which she could have been subjected), and she did perform it accordingly. She found the poor sufferer, whose eye she dreaded to meet, sinking fast into peace and rest, that never more could be disturbed. Miss Brotherton and Fanny were both with her; a bible was in the hands of the former, and Mrs.

Armstrong's countenance, though greatly more pinched and pallid than she had ever before seen it, expressed a tranquil calmness which it was impossible to contemplate without pleasure.

But, alas! for poor Martha! she had the pang of seeing this consoled and consoling look suddenly changed to an expression of intense suffering, the moment her own person met the poor woman's eye. They had never seen each other since the fatal morning on which Martha had so innocently persuaded her to sign the articles of her boy's apprenticeship, and the recollection of that scene, and all its consequences, could not so suddenly come upon one reduced already to almost the last stage of weakness, without shaking her terribly. The distended eye, the open mouth, the heaving breast, all spoke a degree of agitation, which in her condition was frightfully alarming; and Mary who dreaded lest the calmness of her last moments should be disturbed, hastily turned to the intruder, and said, "Go, go!—the sight of you will kill her!"

Though there was no more of harshness in this, than the urgent circumstances of the case seemed to call for, Mary Brotherton would have rather died than utter it, could she have guessed the pang it gave to the already wounded heart of poor Martha. She made no reply; but, fixing on

the victim of her most innocent delusion a look just long enough to impress the terrible expression of her countenance upon her own heart for ever, she turned away, and reached her splendid home in a state of mind that seemed fearfully to verify the denunciation, "He will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children."

That day was the last of the widow's life, and it is probable it might have been so, even if Martha Dowling had not made her unfortunate visit; but the coincidence was fatal to the poor girl's peace, for the anxious inquiries she made respecting her brought the intelligence of her death, and the time of it, with sufficient accuracy to leave no doubt on Martha's mind, that the event had been accelerated by her appearance.

Happily, however, for those who tenderly watched her last moments, the widow Armstrong's gentle nature permitted her not long to suffer from the irritation which the presence of Martha produced; and many hours before she closed her eyes for ever, she expressed her sorrow for having yielded so weakly to feelings which she had hoped were altogether conquered—assuring Mary (who never left her) that she acquitted the young lady of all intention to deceive her, and that the shock she felt from seeing her

only proceeded from the vivid recollections her appearance awakened.

Unhappily, however, it was long ere this healing assurance reached poor Martha; for Miss Brotherton, who was far from guessing its importance to her, had decided upon having no further intercourse with the Dowling family: a resolution which would never have been taken had her last interview with Martha at Milford Park ended more pleasantly. But it had been already so long acted upon, that it would have been equally awkward and disagreeable to break through it; and Martha long continued in the terrible persuasion that she had been accessory to the death of both mother and son.

The loss of the only relatives he had ever known, following as they did so closely on each other, made Mary tremble for the health of Edward. She had watched the affecting close of the poor widow's life with all the tender feeling such a spectacle was calculated to excite in such a heart as hers. She had mourned for Michael for many reasons, and mourned sincerely; but she had hardly known the boy, and it was her sympathy with the sorrow of others, rather than her own, which caused the event to touch her so deeply. But to Edward she had become attached with so much fondness, and

he had inspired such a feeling of wondering admiration in her mind by the extraordinary faculties he displayed, and the justness and uprightness of every thought and feeling, that to watch over his health and welfare had become nearly the first object of her isolated existence. The few months which had elapsed since the whole system of his life had been changed from all that was most injurious to health, to a mode of living in every way conducive to its recovery, had produced a more favourable and decisive effect on him, than could have been reasonably hoped for in the time; and it was a remarkable evidence of the powerful influence which such a change produces on the frame, that not all the sorrow and suffering which Miss Brotherton's intelligence brought, or the heart-wringing loss which followed it, could check the active energy of benignant Nature in restoring health, where all she required for it was given, and all that had hitherto impeded her kindly operations was removed. Yet Edward was still lame, though so much less so than he had been, that his benefactress could not help indulging a hope that time and judicious treatment might remove the infirmity altogether. For some reason or other Miss Brotherton entertained no very particular respect for the medical practitioners of her im-

mediate neighbourhood, and for several months after her return she contented herself with following Mr. Bell's prescriptions, for friction and moderate exercise, without calling in any medical assistance at all. But though the improvement that followed was very perceptible, it was not rapid, and the idea of London advice suggested itself, as the most satisfactory mode of ascertaining at once whether a perfect recovery might be hoped for; information which it was very desirable she should obtain, before she decided in what way she should bring him up. Since the death of his mother, Milford Park had been Edward's home, and the orphan boy's hold on Miss Brotherton's warm heart had been greatly increased by the opportunities this gave her of more frequent intercourse with her. In truth, though he still attended the school for an hour or two every morning, by far the more important portion of his education went on under her own eye, and, as well as that of his little companion Fanny, was beginning to take a form and extent totally different from what she had at first intended for either of them. Ideas respecting them both began by degrees to arise in her mind, which she at first endeavoured to resist, as being too much out of the usual course to be safely indulged in; but "use lessens

marvel," and the notion of making a man of learning of Edward, and a woman of fortune of Fanny, which once and again she had rejected, as too romantic and absurd, gradually grew into an habitual theme of meditation on which her fancy delighted to fix itself.

Mary Brotherton was at that time about twenty-two years old, extremely pretty, and moreover almost childishly young-looking for her age; and whatever she might have brought herself to think of it, most others would very naturally have deemed her adopting a boy of twelve, and a girl of eleven, a most outrageously preposterous and imprudent act. But her situation was one in most respects quite out of the common way, and she every day felt it more impossible that she could continue to endure the station of one of the magnates of a manufacturing neighbourhood, with all eyes fixed upon everything she did, and her whole heart and soul recoiling from companionship with the only persons whom her neighbours and watchers would deem fit to be her particular friends.

The heart of this isolated girl was so clingingly affectionate, that it is probable she would, under almost any other circumstances, have at least loved the beautiful mansion in which she had passed the greatest part of her life, and felt the

trees and flowers that adorned it to be as companions, and familiar friends; but a thousand painful thoughts were mingled with the consciousness that she was mistress of that fair domain; and the very fact that the education she felt inclined to bestow upon the two orphans would bring down upon her the criticisms, and probably the reprobation, of the whole neighbourhood, making it very desirable that the extraordinary project should be carried into execution elsewhere, was in her estimation more in its favour than against it. When, in addition to all this, she succeeded in persuading herself, from some of her miscellaneous reading, that there were German baths which might assist the restoration of Edward's limbs, and that it was her duty to consult the most approved authorities upon his case, the decision to leave Milford Park, and remove to London, was at no great distance.

Had her valued friend and counsellor, Mr. Bell, led her to believe that all the wealth she had, if thrown back among the class from which it was drawn, could have sufficed to remedy the evils under which they groaned, she was quite capable of stripping herself to her last shilling for the purpose: but he knew better, and he taught her to know bet'er too; and having con-

vinced himself that her best chance of happiness, as well as her best opportunity of doing good, would be in yielding to the affection which "her boy and girl" had inspired, he promised to assist her projected removal, by seeing that the orders she left, respecting her property, were faithfully executed; and, about eight months after the death of Mrs. Armstrong, the heiress left her parks and gardens, her splendid mansion and all its gorgeous appurtenances, to attend the orphan boy to London.

The consultation which immediately after her arrival there took place upon the case of Edward was productive of, perhaps, the greatest pleasure Mary had ever known; for the sentence unanimously pronounced was, that the limbs of the boy were in a state of progress towards perfect recovery, the weakness and distortion brought on by his employment, not having lasted long enough to produce any deformity capable of resisting the tendency of nature to recover herself, if not impeded by any fresh unhealthy influence. That any such should arise to disappoint her hopes was not likely; all that was required for him being good air, regular and moderate exercise, wholesome food, and abstinence from all violent exertion for the next year or two. As to her question respecting German baths, the answer was less unanimous; two gen-

tlemen being of opinion that they would do no good at all; two that it was doubtful whether the case would be affected by them or not; and one that great benefit might probably ensue. But as all were of opinion that change of air was desirable, and as a pretty strong inclination to try "fresh fields and pasture new" seconded this judgment, Miss Brotherton determined to start for the Rhine. Mrs. Tremlett declared that she had not the slightest objection to foreign parts; Edward's heart swelled with an ecstacy made up of gratitude, hope, curiosity, and the delicious exhilaration attendant upon returning health; while Fanny looked around her, and listened to every one whose words referred to the expedition, with a very delightful consciousness of being wide awake, but not without some fear that she was dreaming, nevertheless.

Such was the party that filled the travelling-carriage of Miss Brotherton, while an English maid, a French footman, and a German courier, formed her suite.

Nothing, certainly, could be well more whimsical than the party with which she had thus surrounded herself; but this mattered little, since she was pleased with it—and we must leave her in the full enjoyment of a whole host of delightful feelings, while we return to follow the fortunes of poor Michael.

CHAPTER V.

Michael Armstrong sets out upon a dangerous expedition—Its termination proves rather more than he can bear—He meets a good man, and takes service under him—He asks and obtains a holiday, and meets several adventures in the course of it.

WHILE this gay and happy party, who would any of them gladly have exchanged pleasure for pain, could they thereby have purchased only the knowledge of his existence, were thus placing kingdoms between them, the unhappy Michael was still enduring all the miseries of an apprentice at the Deep Valley Mill.

It would be difficult to imagine a stronger contrast in the situation of two brothers than that which many subsequent years presented between him and Edward. Edward!—who had ever been to him as a dearer second self—who had never enjoyed a pleasure unshared by him, and never known a sorrow that had not also been his—Edward was enjoying all that

nature and fortune could give; while Michael still hopelessly dragged on a wretched existence amidst unceasing and unvarying suffering! At length the desperate resolution was formed which put the officials of the Deep Valley factory in the state of activity already described. And where was Michael the while?

Safely ensconced in a sort of rude drain, which he had himself assisted to construct, when he held the regretted office of scavenger of the court, and over the aperture of which he easily arranged sticks and rubbish sufficient to conceal himself, Michael lay for many hours listening to the hubbub which his absence occasioned. He distinctly heard the expression of Mrs. Poulet's anger and scorn, as messenger after messenger returned, without bringing tidings of him; and had, moreover, the advantage of knowing the track that he had purposely made on the grass which grew tall and rank immediately behind the factory, had led them, and would continue to lead them, all one way, while he would of course take especial care to go another.

Having left his foot-marks on the grass in the manner described, Michael had scrambled through the bushes which covered the steep hill-side, for the distance of a few hundred

yards, and then, taking advantage of a layer of stones, by which a patch of marshy ground had been rendered firm, he again crossed the hill towards the factory, without leaving any trace behind. By this simple device his pursuers were completely thrown out, for when night came and he crawled out from his shelter, no eye was open to look for him close to his prison-walls, though very keen ones were busy elsewhere in search of him.

The same strength of frame which had enabled him to escape deformity in the mill, helped him well now, as without food, without sleep, and with every pulse throbbing between hope and fear, he strode rapidly onward on the road he had come with Parsons four years before, carefully avoiding its grassy margin, however, lest more footsteps might be traced. Then, revolving, with great clearness of local recollection, the direction in which this road led, after mounting the hill, he firmly resolved, as long as his strength lasted, to pursue it, till it brought him to the door of his mother's home—provided always, that he was not stopped short by the grasp of an overlooker in the way.

The necessity of procuring food had not appeared to him any obstacle to the undertaking; for not only had he great faith in his own power

of enduring abstinence, but he had faith, too, in the impossibility of begging at a farm-house door for a morsel of bread in vain—nor did either hope deceive him: he walked till night-fall with no other refreshment than water caught in the hollow of his hand from a trickling road-side spring, and a few blackberries, snatched in terror as he hurried on.

As the darkness thickened round him, he called a council with himself, as to whether it would be wisest to lay down under the shelter of a hay-rick, and let sleep serve him for supper, or to venture a petition for a morsel of food at a decent-looking mansion which he saw at some distance, and walk on through the night, if he succeeded, by help of the strength so recruited.

After many anxious reasonings, pro and con, he at last decided upon the latter, and so well did his handsome face and simple assurance that he was very hungry plead for him, that he not only obtained scraps sufficient for a hearty supper but a crust or two for the following morning; and with this treasure he trudged on, foot-sore indeed, and with a pretty strong inclination to lie down and sleep; but mental energy sufficed for many hours to conquer bodily fatigue, and it was not till past three o'clock the next morning that he yielded, and at last laid

himself down in a dry, and as he thought it, most delightfully comfortable ditch, and slept the sleep of youth and weariness for three or four hours. The bright beams of an autumn sun shooting directly upon his eyes awakened him, and he started up, ready and able to walk forward, sufficiently thankful for the hoarded crusts in his pocket.

He was now not more than seven miles from Ashleigh; a fact which he joyfully ascertained by a milestone on a road which he had reached, he hardly knew how, but it must have been by missing, not hitting the way he had endeavoured to find; for Parsons had not followed the high-road from the town for more than a mile, and that was before Sir Matthew's carriage overtook him. Michael looked backwards and forwards along this wide unsheltered road, and trembled to think how easy it would be to see and recognise a fugitive from any spot within sight of it; but there was a burning impatience at his heart when he thought of home, and remembered that he was within two hours' walk of it, which left all caution far behind, and commending himself to God, he set off at the fleetest pace he could achieve, towards Ashleigh.

No symptom of pursuit, however, alarmed him. From the moment he quitted the mills,

to that when he reached what had once been his mother's door, no terror of the kind had come near him; he had heard no whispering voices, nor seen shadowy figures stealing towards him from a distance. All he had most feared was got through with ease; but all he had most fondly hoped turned out a fearful blank.

As Michael drew near the door, he remembered so well every object which met his eye, that he began to fear lest he himself might be remembered by others, and making a circuit to avoid Sir Matthew's mills, he reached Hoxley-lane without having met a single face he knew.

It was a tremendous moment for him, that in which he first caught sight of the lowly door through which he had passed a thousand times in eager anticipation of his mother's kiss! Some minutes followed before he could reach it, and the boy trembled so violently that he tottered, as he hurried onward, like a drunken man.

At length his hand was on the latch; it yielded as in days of yore, and in an instant the door was wide open before him. Poor Michael! what death can have a pang so bitter as that he felt, when the almost impossible project of reaching his mother's home being performed, he found that home empty and desolate, and tell-

ing him, as plainly as angels trumpet-tongued could do, that she was dead!

A dismal groan burst from him, and he sunk on the floor, just where he had last stood gaily talking to her of his bright fancies for the future, a few hours before he was snatched away from her for ever.

The noise he made reached the ears of a woman in the front room, and she opened the door of communication to ascertain who it could be, rummaging in the empty room that was "to let."

"My gracious! I should like to know who you are? What do you want here, you ragamuffin? Is this the way you come to take lodgings, pray?"

This was said by a young and pretty woman who held a baby in her arms, and who being the wife of a confidential overlooker, had not only succeeded to the occupation of No. 12, upon the death of Mrs. Sykes and the dispersion of her family, but considered herself privileged to assume, on most occasions, an air of great importance.

"Mother lived here!" said Michael, with a look wretched enough to soften the heart of the saucy girl who had addressed him.

"Your mother, my poor boy? Are you the little orphan Armstrong, then?" was the reply.

"Is mother dead?" said the unhappy boy.

"Dead? to be sure she is. And where can you have been not to know that? Wasn't you with her when she died?"

"No, no, no!" sobbed Michael; "I came here to find her."

"Poor fellow! that's dismal enough to be sure. I bean't Ashleigh born, but I have heard a deal since I comed here, about the widow Armstrong and the boy as died!"

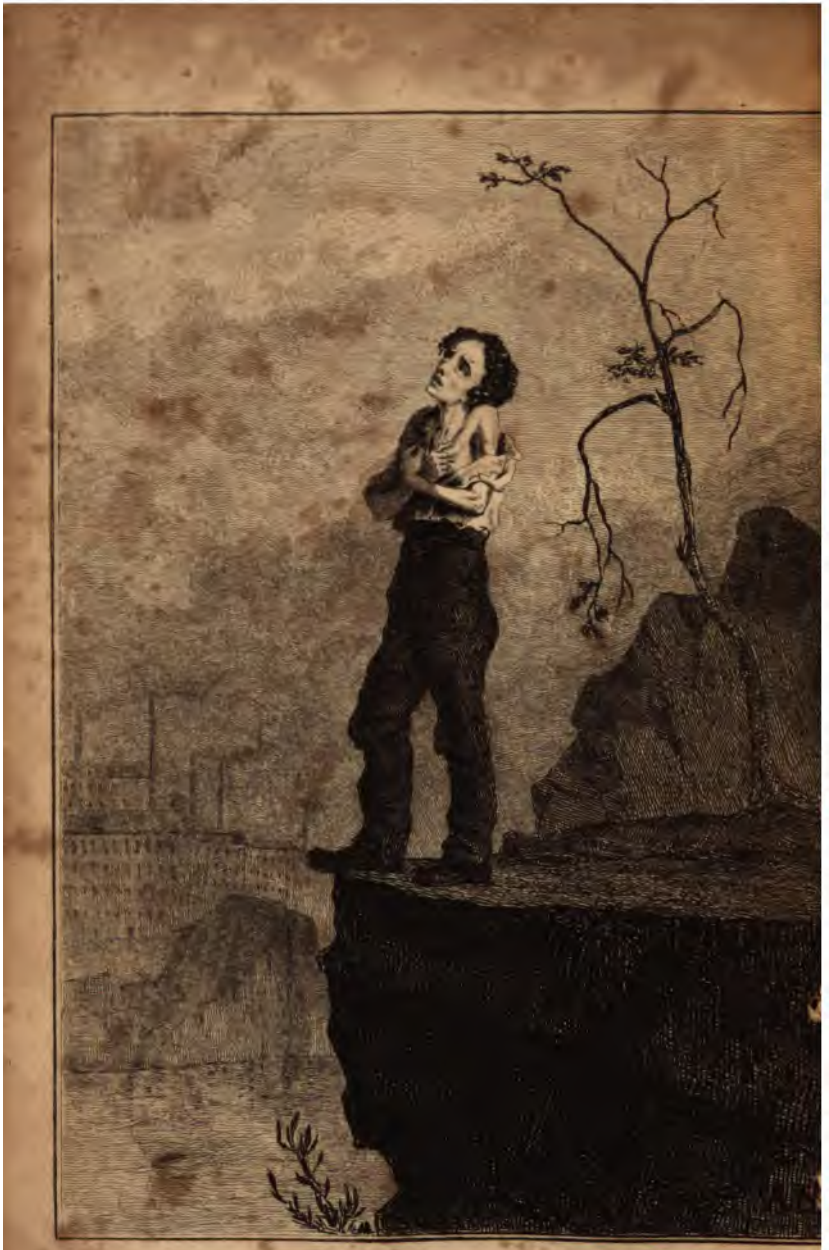
"Died!" echoed Michael, looking wildly at her. "Is he dead too? Is my poor Teddy dead?"

"Surely he is," replied the unthinking young woman, who, in truth, knew nothing about either the widow Armstrong or her son, but remembered hearing that a little more than a year before she took possession of the premises a widow Armstrong had died in the back room, for grief at having lost a boy. She was far from intending to be cruel to the poor lad, who looked himself so very nearly like a corpse, but was too indifferent upon all subjects which did not immediately concern herself to take the trouble of thinking before she spoke.

A few more questions might probably have obtained, if not the truth, at least some proof of

his informer's ignorance of it, but Michael had heard enough; he rose to his feet, and without uttering another word, rushed out of the room.

The state in which he then found himself was certainly nearly approaching to delirium. His strength of body and mind completely exhausted by fatigue, fasting, and intense anxiety, the blow which had fallen upon him was heavier than his reason could bear, and he wandered forth into the fields without knowing where he was, or having any distinct idea of what had befallen him. His devious and unheeded path led him to a spot at the distance of nearly a mile from his former home, at which several miniature rocks of sandstone give something of wildness and dignity to the little stream, which for the most part runs tamely enough, and looks little more than a wide and dirty ditch, as it passes through the town of Ashleigh. A multitude of cotton-factories, with their tall chimneys mocking the heavens, were visible in the distance, on the other side, and the boy stopped in his wild, hurried walk, to gaze upon them, with a feverish consciousness that there at least stood something he had seen before. A frightful flash of memory then shot across his brain—his mother dead—his darling Edward dead—himself a houseless, friendless, starving wretch, who soon would be



"He drew nearer to the extremest verge."

caught and carried back to the prison-house he had ran from only to learn that he had no friend on earth! Such were the thoughts which racked him, as he stood upon the edge of the rocky little precipice, and fixed his eyes upon the quiet water that flowed some twenty feet beneath him. It seemed to present an image of coolness and repose; his burning lips longed to kiss the gentle ripple on its surface—he drew nearer to the extremest verge.

"I should be safe there!" he murmured, looking downwards till his sick head reeled. "God forgive me!" he added, raising his eyes to heaven. "But if I drown, mother! I shall go to thee!" and as he spoke the words, he sprang forward, and plunged into the stream.

The shock restored his wandering senses in a moment; he felt that he was perishing, though unconscious that it was by his own act; and forgetting how little reason he had to wish for life, struggled hard to grasp a bush that protruded from the bank into the stream. But he could not swim, and the efforts he made, though they served for a minute or two to keep him afloat, only increased the distance between himself and the object he endeavoured to reach. His heavy shoes filled with water, and dragged him downwards—his strength failed, his arms

ceased to move, and in another moment the water rippled over his head.

But poor Michael's history was not finished yet. A heavy-looking, elderly man, who had as little as possible the air of one desirous of seeking an adventure, was in the act of examining some sheep in a field, the fence of which was not fifty yards from the rocky ledge from whence the boy had sprung. Having completed his survey, and directed two men who were with him to select a score or two from the lot, the old man reposed himself upon a style in the fence above-mentioned, and having chanced to turn his head from the sheep towards the spot where Michael stood, had watched for a minute or two the boy's agitated movements and demeanour, but without the slightest suspicion of the frightful catastrophe that was to ensue.

No sooner, however, did he hear the splash occasioned by the plunge, than he sprang over the style with the activity of a younger man, and calling to the others to follow him, made his way, with little loss of time, to a bit of pebbly ground on a level with the stream, and at no great distance from the point at which Michael had sunk. But, short as the time had been, the ripple had already disappeared from the surface of the water, and no trace remained of the object

of his search. The two young men whom he had summoned to follow him, though they had not seen the accident, had gathered from his words that something terrible had occurred, and clambering down the rocky cliff, were by his side in a moment.

"It is too late, lads!" exclaimed the old man, wringing his hands together. "I saw the poor distracted creature take the leap, but he was sunk before I got to the bank, and I take it he will never rise again. I shall never forgive myself for not going to him when I saw him throwing his arms about in that wild way. I might have guessed what was going to happen—and may Heaven forgive me for not preventing it!"

"'Tis a man who has thrown himself in?" inquired one of the men.

"Not a man, but a fine young lad as ever you see. Poor fellow! 'Twas early days for him to have found sorrow enough to throw himself out of life that way! If I had ran to him, as I ought to have done, and stopped the deed, who knows but we might have brought him round to a better manner of thinking?"

"'Tis ten to one but he'll come to the top again yet, if he hasn't done it already," said the man.

"But if he comes, he'll come dead, William!" replied the old man.

"I don't know that," rejoined the young shepherd; "the stream runs briskish round yon corner, and would carry him right away with it; but it's worth while having a look lower down. If he rises at all, 'twill be there."

And so saying, the young man set off at a swifter pace than his master could follow him; while the old man and the other shepherd-lad continued for a minute or two to watch the place where he had fallen.

"Halloo! halloo! halloo!" cried a voice at no great distance.

"That's William, by all that's good!" exclaimed the young shepherd; and without waiting for his companion's reply, he ran off at full speed, the old man following with no lagging step, and at the distance of a few yards, after turning the corner formed by another huge mass of sandstone rock, they perceived William, breast-deep in the water, and grasping, at the utmost extent of his arm, a limb of the drowning boy. Before the old Westmoreland statesman (for such he was) could overtake his young companions, the hero of our tale was lying high and dry upon the bank, but whether life was quite extinct, or still lingered in the cold, corse-like form before them, was a question which, when the old man joined the group, the young ones were not able

to answer. Luckily for Michael, the old statesman had seen a man saved from drowning some thirty years before, and he remembered enough of the process he had then witnessed to enable him to give some very useful instructions on the present occasion. They managed to make their patient discharge from his mouth some portion of the superfluous draught he had swallowed, and after bestowing patient and assiduous friction on his breast and limbs, they had the great satisfaction of seeing the chest heave with returning respiration, and all other symptoms of revivification follow in their proper order, till the eyes of Michael were once more widely opened, and fixed with perplexity, and something like terror, on the faces which were bending over him.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated the old man earnestly, "he's safe now, at least from drowning, and I have not got that to answer for. But he isn't in a trim to be left, my lads. He would have been as well in the river, perhaps, as out of it, if we do no more for him."

Then causing Michael to sit, and examining his features with a glance of very friendly curiosity, he said,

"You don't look like a bad boy, my poor fellow. What could have set you upon doing such a desperate action?"

The effort which the poor boy made to answer was ineffectual, and he only shook his head.

"I suppose it's oversoon as yet to expect any information from him," resumed the old man, "so there's nothing to be done, as I see, but just to carry him up between us, if he cannot walk, to the Nag's Head, and have him laid upon my bed there, till he is in a condition to tell us something about himself. Can you feel your legs yet, my boy?" he continued, endeavouring, by the help of his man William, to make him stand up.

But Michael had no power to second their efforts; the two lads, therefore, raised him head and heels, and, preceded by the gray-haired farmer, bore him between them above a mile, to the humble hostelry of the Nag's Head. The procession was too remarkable a one to escape notice, and before it reached the shelter of the little inn a miscellaneous crowd of men, women, and children had joined it. Many of these had been familiar with the features of poor Michael in days of yore, but not one of them recognised the widow Armstrong's boy in the long-limbed, pallid figure that they now gazed upon.

Muster Thornton the Westmoreland yeoman and farmer, was too substantial a customer to be refused any reasonable favour, and the ragged

dripping Michael, was not only permitted to lie down on Muster Thornton's best of beds, but accommodated promptly with dry linen, and duly comforted with more hot brandy, water, sugar, and biscuits than he had any inclination to swallow. He took enough, however, to remove the faintness of inanition; and this, together with dry linen and a bed, sufficed, in spite of the heavy sorrows upon which his mind had not yet dared to fix itself, to sooth him into a long and healing sleep.

When he awoke from it, he was capable of answering all the questions Mr. Thornton put to him, and this he did with a simplicity of pathos that went straight to the good man's heart. That he had been working in a distant cotton-factory, where he had been very hardly treated, and having got away to see his mother and his brother, had found them both dead, was a tale that, if it could not excuse the desperate act which he had attempted, at least accounted for it in a manner that left as much to pity as to blame.

"Poor boy! poor boy!" exclaimed the old man, with tears in his eyes. "It was wrong and wicked—very wrong and wicked! But you must pray God to forgive you, my boy, and never think of such desperate doings more."

"I did not know what I was about, if I remember rightly," said Michael; "my head seemed gone. I don't know how I got to the river, but I am sure I did not go there on purpose."

"So much the better—I am glad to hear it—and it's no great wonder, sure enough, if you did lose your head, coming to such a home as that. But what are you to do next, my poor fellow? I suppose there is no other home for you, is there?"

"I have no home, nor a single friend in the whole world," replied Michael.

"And the only work you have ever been used to, I suppose, is following the wheels in the factories?" said the farmer.

"Except once for three months and a bit that I was kept to cleaning the outhouses and yard, and wheeling away garden-rubbish and such like," replied Michael.

"Well, but that's better than nothing, boy. At any rate, you know how to hold a spade, which is a long deal better than having never used your fingers, except for tying bits of thread. D'ye think you should be willing to work for me, my boy, and tend my farm-yard stock, and do a turn of work in the fields when it was wanted?"

"I *should* be willing, sir," replied Michael,

while a flush passed over his pale face, "I should be willing and most thankful to work for you."

"That's well," said the old man cheerily, "and as to terms, I don't expect we shall find much difficulty: you will come to me, my poor fellow, much in the same condition as you first came into the world: therefore all that you want I must find, which will be about as much as I can afford to give, I take it, just at first, till you, and I too, find out what you're good for. Will you agree to it, my lad, and give me your time and best endeavours for clothes, food, lodging, and good will?"

"It will be a blessed bargain for me, sir," said Michael, "if you will add to all your goodness the excusing my ignorance. But if *will* was all that was wanting to make a good servant, you should not lose by me."

"And will *is* all that is wanting, boy. You are no fool, I take it, by your looks; and if you will mind what is said, and do your best, I shall ask no more. What is your name, my good fellow?"

"Michael—Michael Armstrong, sir."

"Well, then, Michael Armstrong, I am your master, and you are my man. And now you must eat, and then you must go to sleep again, I think, till I have got some decent clothes for

you. Those you wore yesterday have had a good washing, to be sure. Nevertheless, I don't justly like the looks of them."

* * * * * * *

Within six months from this time, Michael Armstrong, promoted to a place of trust, might have been seen sitting upon the hill-side in one of the most romantic spots in Westmoreland, a shepherd's maud wrapped round his person, a sheep-dog at his feet, and his master's flocks nibbling the short grass around him on all sides. Many were the solitary hours he thus passed, and very rich was the harvest they brought him. Had the boy remained a year or two longer in the state that

> " Blocks out the form of nature, preconsumes
> The reason, famishes the heart, shuts up
> The infant being in itself, and makes
> Its very spring a season of decay;" *

had Michael remained a year or two longer at the Deep Valley factory, in the state thus admirably and accurately described, it would have been too late for any contemplation of God's works to have roused his withered spirit to worship and to hope. But as it was, his mind seemed to awaken day by day from the long and heavy sleep in which it had been plunged. With an intellect naturally vigorous, and covetous of

* Wordsworth.

acquirement, and having had his first infant stretch of thought happily and indelibly directed, though with primeval simplicity, to one God and Father of all, his transition from a condition in which

> "Scarcely could you fancy that a gleam
> Could break from out those languid eyes," *

to one

> "Sublime from present purity and joy," *

was rapid and delightful. His heavy losses were not forgotten; but while he meditated beneath the bright arch of heaven on the mother and the brother he had so fondly loved, there were so many sublime and hope-inspiring thoughts mixed with his sorrow, that it could hardly have been called painful.

The worthy "statesman" to whose service he had avowed himself, though he did not, perhaps, follow Michael through all the improving processes which his mountain occupation led to, nor very clearly comprehended the elevating effect of the "skyey influences" under which he lived, was no way slow in perceiving that the Samaritan feeling he had so opportunely displayed in the township of Ashleigh had bound to his service one of the most trustworthy, active, and intelligent lads he had ever met with. There is always, moreover, in the human heart

* Wordsworth.

a propensity to cherish whatever we have preserved; and this feeling, joined to his more worldly-minded approbation of Michael's good gifts, rendered Muster Thornton exceedingly fond of the boy, and well inclined at all times to grant him every reasonable indulgence. But Michael rarely taxed his kindness as far as it was ready to go. Once he had asked, and obtained leave to mount to the top of Helvellyn, and once to make a sabbath-day's journey over the mountain-tops to Ulswater; these were the only occasions on which he had expressed any wish to wander beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the farmer's sheep-walks, and, in truth, this immediate neighbourhood included so many mountain torrents, glassy lakes, stupendous crags, and sylvan solitudes, that there was little need to go beyond it, in order to gratify a passion for the picturesque. But when Michael had attained the age of eighteen years, a longing, and somewhat restless desire seized him to revisit the place of his birth, to seek for the graves of his mother and Edward, to learn tidings of the kind-hearted Martha, to discover, if possible, whether his own escape from the Deep Valley had been communicated to Sir Matthew, and to ascertain whether he still stood in any danger of being reclaimed as an apprentice, in

case of its being discovered that he was at liberty. As to any danger of being personally recognised at Ashleigh, he feared it not; conscious that from his remarkably tall stature, and florid health, he was too unlike the factory-child of former days to run any risk of being known.

It was, however, some months after this wish first suggested itself before he took courage to name it to his indulgent master. When at length, however, he did so, the good man not only gave his free consent, but declared himself well pleased that such a project had entered his favourite's head.

"It will do thee a power of good, Mike," said he. "The only fault I have to find with thee is, that thee beest too steady for a lad of thy years, and that looks as if, with all our care and coaxing, we had not yet been able to make thee forget thy sorrowful childhood. Set off, in God's name, my boy; stay as long as thou wilt, but only promise to come back at last, for I think it would be heart-aching work to part with thee."

Michael gratefully promised a speedy return, and, dressed in his best attire, he set forth upon his much-wished-for pilgrimage to his early home. "It was the pride, the spring-tide of the

year;" every leaf was opened, yet every leaf retained the new-born freshness of its lovely green. The birds saluted him from every bush; the herds lowed from amidst their dewy banquet, in a note that spoke their measureless content; and every object on which his bright young eye fixed itself seemed to echo the abounding gladness of his own heart. How elastic was the step with which he passed along! How proudly and thankfully did he feel conscious of his own high place amidst this wondrous creation! and how perfectly was he convinced, despite all he had read during his lone hours on the mountain side, of the splendour of the cities of the earth, that nothing on its whole surface could exceed in grace and glory the majesty of the gorgeous sun, as he rose triumphantly from out his bed of gold! Had every thought of the boy's heart been chronicled, a very poetical sort of hymn would have been the result; but as it was, all the glowing thankfulness, the heavenward rapture, and the joy supreme, was but for himself alone—yet was it not thrown away, for Michael enjoyed his own existence during these early hours with an intensity that made him feel all his former sufferings most benignantly overpaid by his present happiness. Yet in the midst of this, tears more than once started to his eyes,

as he thought of his mother, and the brother he had so entirely loved. His very soul longed to have Edward by his side, as various fancies chased each other through his fertile brain; and the image of little Fanny, too, with her soft, reasoning eyes, as she used to look at him when preaching patience at the Deep Valley Mill, as he fondly laboured to recall it, made him sigh in the midst of his pleasure and his freedom, to think how sad it was that all he had ever loved should have passed away from his eyes for ever.

But amidst the million proofs of tender commiseration for the sufferings incident, of necessity, to our place in creation (which those who run may read, if they are not very great dunces indeed), there is, perhaps, none more remarkable than the gradual softening of the agony which all who survive what they love are doomed to feel. The state which follows, though as sad as the darkness of the lonely night, made visible by the pale backward glances of the parting moon, has the same soothing stillness too. Passion is over, anxiety at rest, and we feel more than consoled, we feel joyful, as we remember that we too shall pass away and follow them.

The journey to Ashleigh cost Michael three

days' smart walking, but his pockets were no longer in the condition they had been at the time of his never-to-be-forgotten escape from the Deep Valley. He had proved himself a good and faithful servant, and the worthy yeoman paid him accordingly, so that he had wherewithal to recruit his spirits and his strength as he jogged along, and reached the hospitable Nag's Head in his native town on the third evening, rather the better than the worse for his pleasant toil.

His first walk, on the following morning, was to Ashleigh churchyard: but here he was obliged to content himself by knowing that the dear relics of those he wished to honour were near him; for, of course, the only indication by which he could guess whereabouts these precious relics lay, was to be found in the want of all memorial. On the sunny side of Ashleigh churchyard a number of handsome tombstones may be seen; many a massive monument is there, protected by its strong and stately rail; and thereon may be read, by those who list, the important fact that some one who bore a Christian appellation, lies below. To the north, where the grass grows strongest, though the sun never comes to cheer it, are a multitude of little nameless, unclaimed hillocks, closely wedged toge-

ther, and rarely showing even a withy-band across the swelling sod, to testify that some one has cared for what lay hidden under it. To this green republic Michael turned himself, and knew full surely that it was there his mother lay. Another, though even as humble as himself, might, under similar feelings, have addressed inquiries to the parish-sexton, and endeavoured to set his memory to work as to the exact spot where he had buried her—but this Michael dared not do; for it would be at once losing the advantage of his incognito, and laying himself very needlessly open to the danger of being reclaimed by his old enemy, Sir Matthew, as a bound apprentice who had run away. So he contented himself with walking carefully, and with reverential tread, through and among the many grassy mounds, permitting his tears to flow freely as he thought of Teddy, and the dear gentle mother who had so equally loved them both; and then turned slowly away, following a path that brought him at the distance of a mile or so to Brookford factory.

The sensation which he felt when the great many-eyed monster first met his sight was one of unmixed pleasure. He literally hugged himself, and blessed the freedom of his limbs, the firm and healthy action of his pulse, and the

delicious consciousness that he was no man's slave.

For many minutes he stood still to enjoy this; and as his eyes perused line after line of the dusty smoke-stained windows, and recalled the early sufferings he had endured within them, his very heart swelled with gratitude for the change, and he blessed God aloud. But as he approached nearer, and perceived the dim shadowy figures slowly moving here and there, and thought upon the condition of each of them, he almost repented of his selfish joy, and blamed the ecstasy that for a while had made him so utterly forget that thousands were imprisoned still, though he was free.

On and on he walked with his eyes immovably fixed upon the hideous fabric till, sooner than he expected it, he stood before the gates. He had conceived no previous plan by which to enter it, and knew that without some specific business, real or feigned, it would be impossible; but while he stood weighing the danger of possible discovery against his very strong inclination to see what alteration time had made in the troop within—whether he should recognise any among them—and whether his old tyrant, Parsons, was still their chief,—the gates opened, and one of the engine-men, a grizzly

fellow, whom he well remembered when his sable hair was somewhat less silvered, came forth.

He gave Michael a look that very plainly said "What do *you* want?" and in truth, his neat appearance, unstained skin, and free unshrinking eye, very naturally suggested the idea that he could have no business there.

"Is Mr. Parsons within?" said Michael boldly, and daring the inquiry as much because he knew not what to say, as from any deliberate resolution to do so.

"Yes," replied the man; "he is about the place somewhere; I seed him not more than ten minutes ago."

Michael nodded his head, and walkéd through the gate into the court, across which he had passed in trembling a thousand times. Nor was he now quite free from a slight feeling of alarm at the idea of meeting the sharp eyes of his former terrible taskmaster, and felt much inclined to blame himself for the curious temerity which had brought him so nearly within his gripe. But it was too late to retreat, for at the distance of a dozen yards he saw Parsons before him, coming forth from the building into the court. On seeing the stranger he immediately approached him; Michael touched his hat.

"What may your business here be, young man?" said Parsons, eyeing him from top to toe.

"I called in, sir, to inquire whether you happened to want a spinner, and what the wages may be," said Michael.

"Is it for yourself?" demanded Parsons, knitting his brows, and looking at him with a sort of incredulous sneer.

"Why, no, sir, it is for a kinsman who happens to be out of employ," replied Michael, colouring from the unusual consciousness of deceit, and from the same cause casting his eyes upon the ground, thereby displaying the remarkable length of his black eyelashes, and giving to his whole countenance a look much more resembling that of former days, than he had worn when he first entered.

Parsons looked at him with a sort of vague idea that he had seen him before.

"Where do you come from?" said he.

"From Westmoreland, sir. I have been living in service there for these four years past."

"And pray what may your name be?"

"Robert Thornton, sir," replied Michael, blushing again, as he thus unceremoniously borrowed the appellation of his worthy master.

"Have you ever worked in a factory yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I have, when I was a boy," said Michael, from mere want of skill and hardihood in the art of lying.

"And you think you have bettered yourself, I suppose, with your fine buff waistcoat and the rest of it? No, we don't want no spinners here."

Michael by no means unwillingly obeyed this dismissal, and walked away, more than half ashamed of his achievement.

"If I didn't know that Michael Armstrong was dead, I should swear that there chap was him," said a girl somewhat older than our imprudent masquerader, and who had been watching him very earnestly during the foregoing conversation. The observation was not addressed to the overlooker, but to another girl, who had brought the speaker her dinner to prevent her leaving some particular work on which she was employed.

"What's that you say, Sykes?" said Parsons, turning quickly towards her.

"I was saying, sir, as that boy was unaccountable like Michael Armstrong, as used to live in mother's back-kitchen. He wasn't above a year or two younger than me, and I knowed him as well as I did my own brothers."

"Stuff and nonsense, girl! All the world

knows that young rascal died years ago; and fuss enough there was made about it by that mad miss at Milford, who, I suppose, found out that she was their cousin, or something of the sort, for she took it so to heart, that she sold her house and lands, and ran away with another of 'em to some foreign country, for fear he should die too. Sure you must mind all that queer story?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl; "I remember it right well, and that's the reason why I says that I know it can't be him."

"Yet, upon my soul, now you mention it, he was the very image of him. I fancied as I looked at him that sure-ly I had seen him somewhere before. But it can't be—a dead dog is dead, all the world over."

"Yes, sure, sir," responded Kitty Sykes, who being what is called a very sightly girl, was not unfrequently indulged with a little condescending notice from Mr. Parsons. "But 'twas his queer curly black hair, and his particular-looking eyes as put it into my head."

"And if you go on talking of it, Sykes, in that way, you will be putting it into my head too. And after all, there is nothing so very impossible in it. Nobody in these parts could really know much about it, you see, and there's no reason, as

I can tell, why the scamp might not have run away from the Deep—that is, the stocking-weaver's manufactory as he was sent 'printice to, and they as ought to have stopped him might have given out that he was dead," replied the overlooker.

"Then if it *was* possible," resumed Kitty Sykes, "I wouldn't mind taking my bodily oath that that there young fellow was Michael Armstrong, and nobody else."

"Egad, I wish I hadn't let him go!" cried Parsons, running to the gate. "He was 'printiced till twenty-one, and if he has run away, he's liable to be taken up and put in prison, by the first as catches him."

Kitty Sykes took the liberty of running to the gates also; but, to say the truth, she had no wish at all that Mr. Parsons should catch him up, and put him into prison. The girl, though she had prudence enough not to communicate the opinion to her friend Mr. Parsons, thought the stranger by far the handsomest young fellow she had ever seen, and secretly determined, if she could catch sight of him again, that she would give him a hint to keep clear of his old acquaintance.

"There he goes!" cried Parsons, watching

Michael, as with upright gait, and rapid strides, he was pursuing his way by the well-remembered path, which led from the factory to Dowling Lodge. "There he goes! He don't look like one of the mill-people any way—and yet the fellow said that he had worked in a factory. Didn't you hear him, Kitty?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, "and it was just then as I felt so unaccountable sure that, unless it was out and out impossible, it must be Michael Armstrong as was speaking. I never did see such eyes as Michael's, nor such hair neither."

"And there he goes, I'll bet a sovereign," rejoined the overlooker, "to take a look at his old quarters at the Lodge. Kitty, I'll give you a glass of gin and a shilling, if you'll run after him—you can run like a hare, I know—run and bring him back, Kitty—there's a darling, and say as I have got some good news to tell him."

Off started the girl with right good-will, having her own reasons for wishing to do the errand, as well as a very sufficient inclination to gain the promised reward.

Mr. Parsons by no means overrated her running powers; and had she been less fleet, she would have failed in her object, for Michael walked briskly, and without any inclination to

remain longer in the vicinity of the mill, though by no means conscious that he had been recognised.

He had just turned the corner of a hedge when the girl overtook him, so that their colloquy did not take place within sight of the overlooker.

Michael heard the fair Kitty's approach, and turned to see who it was that just came galloping and panting after him.

"Do you want me, young woman?" said he, civilly stopping for her.

"Well, then, you are no changeling!" replied the girl, laying her hand on his arm; "you were always out-and-out the civilest boy in the mill."

A very bright suffusion dyed the clear brown of Michael's cheek as he heard this.

"I do not know what you mean," he replied.

"Come, come, Michael Armstrong," rejoined Kitty, "you needn't be afraid of me. Don't you remember Kitty Sykes, as have gone to and from the mill with you and Teddy a hundred and a hundred times?"

"Is it indeed Kitty Sykes, grown into such a handsome young woman?" said Michael, holding out his hand to her, and feeling quite incapable of preserving his incognito, in the presence of so old an acquaintance. "And to think of your knowing me, Kitty! But you must not

betray me, my dear girl. If I was found out for Michael Armstrong, I might get into a scrape."

"And that's true, and no lie," answered the faithless ambassadress, "for I am sent after you by that old beast, Parsons, to tell you to come back, because he had good news for you. But his news would just be to give you notice to march into prison for having run away; and I agreed to carry his message for him. He thinks that I delight in him, the old monster! but I'd rather walk a mile to do a kindness to you, Michael, than stir an inch to please him."

"God bless you, my dear girl! I hope you have done me a great service now; for I think I could show him leg bail, that he would find it difficult to refuse, Kitty. So now good-bye, old friend; I am sorry to part so soon, but it won't do to stay here to be caught,—will it?"

"No, truly, Mike! I'd be loth to see any friend of mine at his mercy, or at that of his master, either. But you won't go clear away out of the country without seeing me again, will you? You needn't be feared of him; 'twill be easy enough to put him off the scent. I'll back, and tell that we was both of us altogether deceived, and that you bean't no more Michael Armstrong than he be."

"I don't think I ought to stay in Ashleigh

now, Kitty; there's others may know me as well as you and he, and 'twould be a terrible change, I can tell you, my dear girl, to come down from the hills where I am tending a good master's sheep, and often feel so high and so happy, that I think I am half-way to heaven—it would be a terrible change, Kitty, to come from that into the Deep Valley Mill again, which is as much worse than our old factory here, as hanging is worse than whipping!"

"Lord have mercy upon 'em, then!" ejaculated the poor girl. "But I say, Michael, you needn't run no risk at all, if I go back and say as it isn't you, and then you might meet me after nightfall, in the town."

"It will not be very long, Kitty, before I am one-and-twenty, and a free man, and it's then, please Heaven, that I'll come back again, and pay the old place a visit. You have been kind enough to remember me so long, that I don't think you'll have forgotten me by that time, and it shall go hard with me but I'll bring you a token from some of our north-country fairs." So saying, he gave the damsel a kiss, and she wrung his hand without making any further effort to detain him.

"God bless you!" said the retreating Michael, over his shoulder.

"And God bless you, too, you nice boy!" muttered poor Kitty. "I wouldn't ask no better luck, than just to follow you, and keep sheep too."

Either from wishing to look after him as long as he was in sight, or for the purpose of giving him law, in case Mr. Parsons should determine on pursuit, Kitty Sykes remained stationary on the spot where Michael left her, till, abandoning his hardy project of a visit to Dowling Lodge, he had stretched far away over the fields towards the road he was to pursue northwards to his peaceful home; and then she walked leisurely back to the factory, where, after a sharp reproof for staying so long, and a pert reply to it, she informed the overlooker that they had both been wrong, but that the young lad said he might be found if he was wanted at the sign of the Magpie; that was about a mile on the road towards London.

Warned by this unexpected recognition, Michael determined to run no more risks among his townfolks; but not being disposed to lose the little bundle he had deposited at the Nag's Head, he ensconced himself within the shelter of a small public-house, on the road-side, resolved to wait there until the evening set in, and then to venture back to his last night's lodging, pay

"But God bless you too, you nice boy!"

his bill, reclaim his bundle, and set forth upon a night-march, which he hoped would take him beyond all danger of Mr. Parsons, before the following morning.

Having secured his welcome by the usual ceremony of ordering a meal, Michael looked about him for some means of occupation during the hours which he had doomed himself to pass there, and in despair of finding any better literary amusement, seized upon a heap of hand-bills, of a vast variety of external forms, but having, as he found upon examination, one and all the same object, namely, the calling together a general meeting of the whole county of York (then undivided), for the purpose of signing a petition to parliament for a law, limiting the hours of labour in factories to ten hours a day. Michael Armstrong was no longer a factory operative: free as the air he breathed upon his beloved mountain-tops, he no longer trembled at the omnipotent frown of an overlooker, nor sickened as he watched the rising sun that was to set again long hours before his stifling labour ceased. All this was over and ended with him for ever. Yet did his heart throb and his eye kindle as he perused page after page of the arousing call which summoned tens of thousands, nay hundreds of thousands, to use the right their

country vested in them, of imploring mercy and justice from the august tripartite power that ruled the land.

Very powerful was the male and simple eloquence with which many of these unpretending compositions appealed to the paternal feelings of those they addressed; and such terribly true representations were found among them of the well-remembered agonies of his boyhood, that Michael was fain to put his spread hand before his face to conceal the emotions they produced.

He had sat in this situation for some minutes, revolving both his former sufferings, and the blessedness of his present release from them, when a man, who had been quietly sitting writing at a distant window, but had nevertheless found leisure to watch Michael's countenance as he proceeded with his examination of the handbills, rose from his place, and gently approaching him said, in a deep, yet very gentle voice, "You seem moved by the perusal of these papers, my good friend. Is it the first time you have met with them?"

"Yes, indeed, sir, it is," replied Michael, starting from his reverie.

"Then I presume you are a stranger in this part of the country?"

"Why, yes, sir; the master I serve is a West-

moreland statesman, and I am only come this way upon a holiday trip."

"Then maybe you don't care enough for the poor factory operatives to join their meeting, and put your name to their petition?"

"If caring for them could do them any good, master," replied Michael, warmly, "they would be in no want of help, as long as I was near them. But I don't think the name of a poor servant-boy like me could do them either honour or service."

"Then what sort of names, my good lad, do you suppose will support this petition? Do you think the great mill-owners will sign it? Do you think such men as Sir Matthew Dowling, for instance,—whom you may have heard spoken of down at Ashleigh, maybe,—do you think it will be such as he, whose first object in life is to get as many hours of labour out of the little creatures that work for him as stripes can make them give,—do you think it will be such as he that will sign the ten hours' bill?"

"Not if that bill is either to hurt himself, or better the children, I should think," said Michael.

"True enough," replied his new acquaintance; "and not only is that true, but he and the like of him will do all that mortal men can to

prevent all others from signing it. But heaven forbid they should succeed, young man: for if they do, the best hope of many thousand suffering and most helpless human beings will fall to the ground!"

"Then, indeed, may heaven forbid that they should have their will!" returned Michael, fervently. "When is this meeting to take place?" he added, turning his eyes again to the papers he still held in his hand. "But three days hence!—truly I should like to witness it!"

"Is there any reason against your doing it?" demanded the stranger. "Will your services be wanted by your master before that time?"

"He won't expect me till two or three days after it," replied Michael; "I have done all I wanted—at least I have stayed as long as I wished at Ashleigh, and I don't see any great harm there would be in witnessing the meeting."

"Do see it, my good lad!" said the stranger; "I predict that it will offer a spectacle such as never was witnessed before, and most likely never will, or can be, seen again. A multitude, probably amounting to above a hundred thousand over-worked operatives, will meet in peace and good order, to petition for legal relief from the oppression of a system which has brought them to a lower state of degradation and misery

than any to which human beings have ever been brought before. Were those in whom these poor people have confidence less deeply anxious to preserve the public peace than they are, a different mode of redress might be sought for. But, as it is, an honest man may venture to advise such a respectable young fellow as you seem to be, to stretch your good master's leave a little, in order to be present at this great spectacle."

A good deal more conversation followed on the same theme, and ere Michael had ceased to listen to his companion, he felt convinced that duty as well as inclination would lead him to do all that a loyal subject and peaceable citizen could, in aid of the suffering class from whose ranks he had so miraculously escaped. In a word, Michael Armstrong determined to attend the great Yorkshire meeting, and hold up his hand for the ten hours' bill.

The extraordinary circumstances attending that enormous meeting; the *unaccountable* disappointments which at every halting-place attended all the precautionary efforts of the committee to procure bread for the multitude, while beer was everywhere found ready, and in the greatest abundance; the terror felt by those most interested lest heat, fatigue, exhaustion,

and beer together might lead to some disturbance of the peace; and the triumphant influence of reason and kindness joined, in inducing the hungry multitude to separate peaceably, are already matters of history, and the narrative must therefore adhere to the fortunes of its hero, without dwelling upon nobler themes.

In returning to Ashleigh for his bundle, Michael took good care to be as little seen as possible: he was, in fact, more than ever anxious to avoid detection, as the more he meditated on his recollections of Sir Matthew Dowling and Parsons, the more did he feel convinced that, should he fall into their power before the age of twenty-one, matters would go very hard with him.

At the great assembling of the people at York, he feared not that he should encounter any enemy; the only human beings whom he could so designate being likely to show themselves at the most distant part of the kingdom, rather than before the face of the multitude to be expected there. No feelings of distrust or alarm, therefore, arose to check the pleasurable excitement which this expedition was calculated to inspire; and Michael, with his stout staff over his shoulder, and the cotton handkerchief, containing a change of linen, suspended from it, set out with a light heart and active step upon a walk in

which he soon found himself joined by many thousand companions.

The assurance given him by his unknown acquaintance, that he should see a wonderful and spirit-stirring spectacle, was fully verified. The very sight of the road along which he travelled, —which looked like a dark and mighty current moving irresistibly along, while tributary streams flowed into it on all sides, so thick and serried was the mass that moved along it,—was of itself well worth the toil it cost him, to behold its peaceful tumult. From time to time Michael indulged in a little questioning of the various individuals beside whom he found himself: but for the most part the men were too intent upon the object of their expedition to converse idly respecting it; and by degrees our hero grew as silent as the rest, and trudged on without any other communion than that of his own thoughts.

It was at about twenty miles' distance from York, when the multitude were on their return, that a circumstance occurred, which, being of considerable importance to Michael, must be detailed somewhat at length. He had entered an inn by the road-side, which, being one of the largest post-houses on the north-road, had an air of pretension and costliness about it that caused the great majority of the host to walk on, with-

out venturing to approach precincts so dangerous.

But Michael was much exhausted, and having already discovered, when passing before the humbler houses of public entertainment, that no rest could be hoped from entering them, every inch of space being occupied, he deemed it wisest to disburse a splendid shilling, rather than fag on till he had no strength to go farther.

In pursuance of this reasoning he entered the kitchen of the Royal Oak, and called for bread, cheese, and a pint of beer. Though there were not many of his fellow-travellers either rich or extravagant enough to share these splendid quarters with him, there were, nevertheless, three or four men taking refreshment in the apartment. One of these, an elderly, respectable-looking personage, who had, as it seemed, exclusive possession of a snug little round-table in a corner, made a sign to Michael to share it with him. This was gratefully accepted, the loaf and cheese were already there, and the foaming tankard quickly followed.

"I marked you at the meeting," said his sociable companion. "It did my heart good to see a sprinkling here and there of them that come out of pure love and kindness to their poor fellow-creatures, having nothing themselves to

gain. 'Tis a pity, and a sin too, that so many Englishmen stand idly by, when such a business as this is afoot, just as if they had nothing to do with it. But they are one and all mistaken, and that they may chance to find out, too, one of these days."

"You give me credit for more than I deserve, perhaps," replied Michael; "that is, if you think my heart was enough with the poor factory folks to make me take a long round about to sign with them, without having had some knowledge of their sufferings myself. You are right in thinking that I am not one of them now; but I have been, and heaven forbid I should ever forget it! for the keeping that time in mind is quite enough to make every thing that comes to me now seem light and easy."

"You have worked in a factory?" said the other, in an accent of surprise; "I should never have guessed as much—but you are very right to be thankful for the present, instead of ashamed for the past. But I don't think," he added, eyeing the fine person of Michael from head to foot, "I don't think I ever saw a lad who showed so little signs of having suffered in health and limb from it. Some lucky accident must have taken you away early?"

"I have seen many a boy and girl crippled

for life," replied Michael, "before they were as old as I was when I ran away."

"My good fellow," whispered his companion, "don't you use them words again. You are safe with me, I promise you; but if you ran from indentures, you won't do wisely to tell of it."

"You must blame your own kind and friendly looks," said Michael, smiling; "I know well enough that what you say is true, and it isn't a thing I should have told to many. But excepting just now that I took a fancy to come back, and take a look about the old place where I was born, I have got so clear and clean away from mills and mill-owners, that I have grown rather bolder, maybe, than I ought to be. My business now, thank heaven! is sheep-tending upon the beautiful free hills of Westmoreland."

"You may well be thankful for such a change," replied his friendly companion: "it must have been some unaccountable good luck, for in general a runaway factory-'prentice is hunted down and caught long before he has got among the good hill-folks."

"It was, indeed, a blessed chance for me," said Michael, with deep feeling. "I fell into the hands of the best man and the best master that ever a wretched runaway hit upon."

"I almost wonder at you, then, venturing to come within sight of your own place again. You can't be one-and-twenty yet, by your looks, and you would not over-well like to work out your time in a factory, I should think," said the other.

"I don't think I should," replied Michael, laughing; "and I have run some risk, I promise you, already, of the very thing you talk of, since I left my master's house. Nothing would content my foolish fancy for calling back old times, but going to look at the very factory where I first worked, and talking to the identical tyrant who tortured me there."

"But he did not know you, I hope?" said the old man.

"I can hardly say that he did not," replied Michael, "for some notion or other came into his head, and after I left him he sent for me to come back again. It was, however, by a friendly messenger, who knew well enough who I was, and gave me pretty plainly to understand which way I had better walk—and that was good luck again. But I was sorry, too, to have to turn away from the old place without learning any news of my former acquaintance. I found the same overlooker at Sir Matthew Dowling's mill, and that was all I could find out."

"Sir Matthew Dowling's mill at Ashleigh?—

that's my country too. My wife keeps a school at Milford," replied the man, "and we have heard enough of Sir Matthew."

"Can you tell me any thing about his daughter Martha?" demanded Michael, with the appearance of being greatly interested in the inquiry. "She was very kind to me, and I loved her next best, I think, to my own dear mother and brother. Do you happen to know any thing about her?"

"Not just at present," replied the man; "though they do say that all the family are likely to have a downfal, owing to Sir Matthew's getting into a scrape about bad bills, or something or other, t'other side of the water. But I do well remember something particular about Miss Martha that you talk of, a matter of seven years ago; and if she was good to you, it was more than she was to everybody, for it was all along of a cruel piece of treachery of hers, that I lost the best mistress that ever man had. I dare say, if you come from Ashleigh, you must know the name of Miss Brotherton, though it's long since she left Milford? I was her coachman, and if it had not been for Miss Martha Dowling, I believe I might have been so still."

"I was but just turned ten years old at the time I knew Miss Martha," returned Michael;

"but I shouldn't have thought she could be treacherous to any body."

"She was, though; for all our people knew the whole story from first to last, and a queer story it was too, when one thinks of the end of it; which was neither more nor less than sending our dear young lady away out of the country."

"I never happened to know any thing about the lady who owned the park," replied Michael; "except that she was one of the fine folks as I have seen at Dowling Lodge; but I should like to hear the story, because of Miss Martha."

"Why, the short and the long of it was that there was a poor widow called Armstrong—"

Michael started so violently, that his companion stopped.

"Did you happen to know her, my lad?" he added after a pause.

"Yes, sir, I remember her very well—but please to go on."

"Well, then, this widow Armstrong had two sons, and one of them was had up to the great house, Dowling Lodge I mean, for some nonsensical reason or other; and Sir Matthew pretended to make the greatest fuss in the world about him, and the whole country was talking about it. But for some offence of the poor boy's, I never rightly heard what, the old sinner deter-

mined upon sending him 'prentice to the most infernal place, by all account, that the earth has got to be ashamed of. And how do you think the poor widow was coaxed over to sign the indentures? Why, by your friend, Miss Martha, and no one else, and that I know upon the best authority. Well, 'tis a long story, the ins and outs of it, and I can't say that I ever rightly understood the whole, but this I know to be fact: that our young mistress took the whole thing so much to heart, that she actually set out to look after the boy; but when she got to the murderous place the poor little fellow was dead! And what did she do then, dear tender-hearted lady! but bring back a pretty little girl instead of him, because, as we all guessed, she was determined to save somebody."

The emotion of Michael Armstrong on hearing this was so entirely beyond his power to conquer, that he lost all capability of utterance, and instead of asking the name of the little girl —an inquiry which he in vain strove to make —he sat pale and gasping, with his eyes fixed on the speaker, and every limb trembling.

"The Lord have mercy on us! what is the matter with you, my good fellow?" said Miss Brotherton's *ci-devant* coachman. "You look cruel bad! Is it my tale as turns you so? or is

it that you have walked too much and too fast?"

"No, no, no! *Pray* go on!" murmured Michael, making a strong effort to articulate.

"'Tis the story, then? and you knowed the poor Armstrongs, beyond all doubt?" said the kind-hearted coachman. "Well, then, you shall hear the end of it. When my mistress brought back the news of the little fellow's death, his poor mother, who was but a sickly, cripply sort of body, just broke her heart and died; whereupon Miss Brotherton took home the other boy, put him to school to my wife, and then took to teaching him herself, and treated him for all the world as if he had been her own brother; and then she began to fancy that he wanted a doctor——"

"And then," groaned Michael, suddenly interrupting him,—"and then he died?"

"You don't say so?" said the coachman, in an accent of regret. "Did he indeed, poor boy? Well now, I'm sorry for that; for it was a pleasure to see him growing taller and stouter every day, almost, as one may say. And when was it he died? It's curious that we should never have heard of it."

"Heard of it?" said Michael, while a sort of wild uncertainty took possession of his mind,

that gave him the feeling of one whose reason threatened to leave him. "Heard it? Why did you want to hear it? Could you not see it, and know it, if he was living in the same house with you?"

"For certain I could, if he had died while Miss Brotherton remained at the park; but that he did not, for I drove him off the first stage myself, alive and well, and looking as beautiful as he always did, poor lad, for he was, to be sure, the handsomest-faced boy that ever I looked upon. But what might have happened to him afterwards is of course more than I can say: for when the place was sold, and all of us paid off, all we heard was, that our dear young lady was set off to travel in foreign countries, and had left pensions to every one of her servants according to their length of service. So we know nothing since."

"Is there no one can tell me where she is gone, and in what land my brother died?" said Michael, violently agitated.

"Your brother?" said his companion, "Who do you mean by your brother, my lad?"

"Teddy!—my brother Edward!—I am Michael Armstrong!" was the convulsive reply.

"God bless my heart and soul! And you be the boy as Miss Brotherton went to look

after? And she got into the wrong box, then, about you being dead? Was there ever any thing like that? But who was it, my boy, that told you as your brother was dead?"

"A woman in Ashleigh—one living in the house where my mother died. She told me that my mother was dead, and my brother too."

"Did she know who she was speaking to? Did she know you was Michael Armstrong?" said the old coachman with quickness.

"No, she knew me not," replied Michael; "but she knew that the widow Armstrong and her boy were dead."

"Then I'll be hanged if I believe as your brother *is* dead!" replied the other eagerly. "When she said the widow's boy she meant you, I'll lay my life on it; and there is nobody in Ashleigh, if they had told of her death, but would have named that of her boy too; but it would have always been meaning you, because everybody knew that one followed close upon the news of the other. And I don't believe that your brother's dead, and that's a fact."

Michael clasped his hands rigidly together, and closing his eyes, remained so long motionless, that his good-natured companion became alarmed, and laying his hand upon the poor

lad's arm, shook him gently, as he said, "Any how, my good fellow, there is no cause for you to break your heart with thinking about it all. Talking about your poor mother, and her love of you, has made you turn as pale as a sheet; and natural enough, too, perhaps. But my notion that your brother is alive and well ought to comfort you—oughtn't it?"

Michael opened his eyes, and fixing them on his companion, said, "The joy of it is more than I can bear!" and then the tears bursting forth, he wept copiously; a timely relief, for which he had great reason to be thankful.

"Well, well, I don't mind seeing you cry a little—that won't do you no harm; and, thank goodness, your colour is coming back again! I declare I thought I had been the death of you," said his new friend. "But I'll tell you something more, and that is the name of him as knows more about Miss Brotherton and your brother Edward too, I'll be bold to say, than any body in the whole country, and that's Parson Bell, of Fairly."

"And where is Fairly?" said Michael, starting up. "How long shall I be in getting there? The hope is only hope yet, you know—there is no certainty. Edward! dear, dear Edward! Is it God's pleasure that I should see him again

in this world? Is it possible that such a heavenly dream can ever come true? Oh! how often have I sat upon the hill and watched the clouds, and thought that he was above them all!"

"Poor boy! But 'twill be better still, for a few years to come, that he should be upon the earth along with you, won't it?"

"Where is Fairly?" reiterated Michael. "How long shall I be in getting there?"

"Longer than you'll like, my dear boy," replied the coachman. "It's a good sixteen miles from this very house; I should not wonder if they was to charge seventeen, and you must not think of trying to compass that to-night, for you are not in any wise in a fit condition for it, changing colour as you do every minute. Your best course will be to rest here for the night, and set off again by times to-morrow morning, and that will bring you in easy by about the middle of the day, you know."

"Impossible!" said Michael. "I owe you more than I am able to thank you for, and I would be willing to show my gratitude by following your advice—only, sir, I am quite sure I could not sleep a wink. And I don't think it would do me any good to lie tossing from side to side, unknowing, for certain, whether my own dear Teddy was alive or dead! So, if you please,

I must set off directly, that I may know the best and the worst at once."

"I suppose at your age I should have done the same; therefore I won't pretend to quarrel with you for it," replied the good man; "but I suppose it would be just prudent to call for an ink-horn, and to set down upon a bit of paper the name of the good clergyman that you are to call upon, as well as his place of residence."

"There is no need of that, sir," said Michael; "*Parson Bell, of Fairly,* are the words you said, and they, as well as all the rest you have spoken, seem as if they were stamped on my very heart. But yet, before I start, I should like to use the ink-horn too, that I might write a line or so to my good master. I know he will be troubled in his mind about me if I don't get back, and I don't know rightly how long it may be. God bless him, good man!" continued Michael; "it was he that had me taught to write, and he shan't be left with any doubts or fears upon his mind for want of a letter from me."

This was a measure that the coachman greatly approved, and observing that he was well known in the house, and sure to be minded, he undertook to order the writing materials, as well as something substantial by way of a supper; declaring that though he had come into his

young friend's wild scheme of walking off straight away for Fairly, instead of putting up for the night, either where they were, or at Leeds, he should not part with him without a quarrel, if he refused to accept and do justice to the good cheer he should provide. This kindness on the part of the man who had so strongly influenced his destiny was both well intentioned and wisely devised; for greatly did the agitated young man stand in need of recruited strength and tranquillity, before he set off upon a new expedition, which was to lead to information so vitally important to his happiness. Though it was somewhat against his inclination, he accepted the friendly invitation gratefully, and the materials for writing being set before him, he addressed the following epistle to Mr. Thornton:

"Honoured Master!

"Your goodness to me, in all ways, would make any abuse of it on my part a heavy crime indeed—too heavy, I think, for me to commit, or you to suspect me of. But I cannot be at the supper-table at Nickerby, on next Saturday night, according to my promise. A very strange thing has happened to me, dear master, which may, perhaps, come to nothing, and in that case I know you will hear my story, and pity me too

much to think of anger. But if all I hope comes to pass, your generous heart will rejoice with me, and you will bless your own goodness, for bringing me to the knowledge of the very greatest joy that ever fell to the lot of a human being, by giving me this holiday.

"I am, honoured Master,

"Your faithful and grateful servant,

"MICHAEL ARMSTRONG."

Having finished his letter, and committed it to the post, Michael felt somewhat more tranquil, and endeavoured to assume with his new acquaintance an air of greater composure and self-possession. But his heart beat, his temples throbbed, his thoughts wandered, and when he and his friendly companion sat down to supper, the poor boy felt that he could almost as easily have swallowed the board itself as any portion of the substantial fare which was spread upon it. But he quaffed a long and refreshing draught from a pitcher of cold water, and putting, at the suggestion of the worthy coachman, a crust in his pocket, he sallied forth with the agitating consciousness that on the information of which he was in pursuit hung all his earthly hopes.

His new friend shook his head as he felt his

feverish hand, and marked his heightened colour and his eager eye.

"God bless you, boy!" said the good man. "Remember, if you fall sick by the way, that my name is Richard Smithson, that I live at Milford, near Ashleigh, and that I'll hold myself ready to come to you at a pinch, if you should happen to have need of me. And here, Michael Armstrong, are three sovereigns, that I give you to keep for two reasons. One is, that you may use them in case you have need. The other, that, if you don't want them, I shall be sure to see you, when you bring them back, and that you will do, or I'll never trust a lad's face more; and now good bye. It is but a wildish sort of boy's trick though, setting off this way at night, when you ought to be in bed."

"The air and the walk will do me more good than all the beds in the world!" replied Michael. "God bless you, sir! See me you shall if I continue to live," and so saying he strode forth into the night, with a longing for greater space to breathe in than could be found in the kitchen of the Royal Oak.

The boy was right as to the effect which this bodily exertion would produce upon him. The very darkness calmed him: he took his hat off that the cool air might bathe his temples with

its dewy breath; and though his pace was rapid, and scarcely relaxed for a moment during many miles, the action of his pulse became more healthy, and the aching of his throbbing temples passed away.

All he now seemed to fear was that his imagination should cheat him into the persuasion that all he wished was true. Edward! Fanny! (for of her identity with Miss Brotherton's protégée he could hardly doubt, when he remembered the history of her departure from the Deep Valley)—these names seemed to ring in his ears, and to be inscribed in starlight on the heavens as he raised his eyes towards them. And thus the sixteen miles were traversed before he had half chewed the cud of all the sweet thoughts that thronged upon his fancy. When he reached Fairly, it was still much too early to find any one stirring, so Michael unceremoniously walked into a cart-shed, and clambering up into a vehicle that had the sweet savour of newly-carried hay to recommend it, he placed his bundle under his head, and, despite both hopes and fears, fell into a sound sleep, nor waked till cocks, hens, cows, pigs, and ploughboys, all joined in chorus to arouse him.

CHAPTER VI.

An important interview—Doubts and fears.

MICHAEL'S first recollections on opening his eyes were not of the clearest kind, and it required at least a minute's looking about him, after seating himself upright in the cart, before he could perfectly understand where he was, or why and how he got there. But no sooner did all the events of the day before rush back upon his mind, than he felt conscious of being near the most important moment of his life. Again he closed his eyes, but not to sleep, and fervently prayed that, whatever might be the tidings which awaited him, he might have strength to receive and bear them as he ought. Then, springing from his resting-place upon the ground, he inquired of a lad near him the way to Mr. Bell's, and set off to follow the directions he received, with no greater delay than was necessary for a short halt beside a little streamlet on the way, which offered a welcome opportunity of washing

his face and hands before he petitioned for admission to the presence of the good clergyman, to whose words he looked forward with an intensity of interest which almost amounted to agony.

Though it was still early, Mr. Bell was already in his garden, and when the gate opened, it was himself who turned towards it to learn the errand of the young stranger. Michael felt at the first glance that the gentleman who stood before him was the person from whom he was to learn whether the brother he had so long mourned as dead was still alive, and he trembled so violently from head to foot that he could not articulate a word.

"What ails you, my lad?" said Mr. Bell, gently laying a hand upon his shoulder, and looking earnestly in his face. "You have not the look of one who has done mischief, or else I could fancy that you had some terrible tale to tell. Come into the house and sit down, my man, for it is very clear you are not quite able to stand."

Michael, still silent, followed his considerate host into the house, and thankfully received from his hands a glass of water, which did him good service, for in a minute or two he was able to say, "I want you to tell me, sir—may God

give me strength to hear your answer, let it be which way it may!—I want to know—if Edward —if my brother, Edward Armstrong, is alive or dead?" But notwithstanding Michael's torturing eagerness to hear the answer, he put his hand before his eyes, because he had not courage to bear the look that might forestall it.

"Your brother? Edward Armstrong your brother? Who then are you, boy, in the name of heaven?" said Mr. Bell, eagerly.

"I am Michael, sir, Michael Armstrong. But oh! for pity's sake, tell me what I ask!"

"Yes, boy, yes. But compose yourself, my dear fellow! Edward is alive, and your friend Fanny Fletcher too."

Michael sunk from his chair upon his knees, and lifting his clasped hands towards heaven, seemed breathing thanksgivings for this assured confirmation of tidings which, till now, he had not dared to believe true. But, startled as he was, the anxiety, the excitement, and the fatigue of the preceding night and day had been more than enough for him, and at the moment when every thought would have been joy, and every sensation delight, he ceased to think or feel at all,—the colour forsook his lips, his eyes closed, and, greatly to the dismay of Mr. Bell, he sunk prostrate on the floor.

No time was lost before the usual means of restoring suspended life were administered; and the uncared-for factory boy, the mountain-braced Westmoreland shepherd, lay extended on a sofa, with essences at his nose, and the opening of his dark eyes watched for as tenderly as if he had been a delicate young lady.

A deep-drawn sigh announced to Mr. Bell, who stood by anxiously watching him, that his remedies had been successful; that the boy so long mourned as dead was really and truly alive, and a very handsome, well-grown fellow into the bargain.

"This is a strange history, Michael, as ever I chanced to hear," said he, taking the boy's hand, and ascertaining that his pulse made "healthful music." "Why we have been all mourning for you as dead for this many a-year, and now you drop down, as if from the clouds, and, by what I can make out, have been fancying on your side that Edward was dead too. The first thing to do must, I think, be to give you some breakfast; and then, if you are strong enough, you shall tell me how all this has come to pass."

Full as his heart was, and eagerly as he longed for the conversation in which he had so much to learn, as well as to tell, Michael gratefully submitted to this arrangement, till having received

from the hands of the deeply-interested Mrs. Bell herself the refreshment he so greatly needed, he felt his young strength return, and if he trembled as he turned his eyes towards his kind host, with a look that seemed to say, "Now, sir, I can talk to you," it was from eagerness, not weakness.

Mr. Bell understood the appeal, and well-inclined to answer it, said, "Having told you that Edward is alive and well, my dear boy, and only wants the sight that I see now to make him perfectly happy, I think you ought to be satisfied. and not expect me to tell you any more till my curiosity is gratified by hearing your own history. How in the world did it happen, Michael, that when Miss Brotherton went to the Deep Valley Mills, on purpose to look for you, she should come back persuaded that you were dead, though the charming little girl she brought away with her had seen you there, and seemed to know you well?"

Michael Armstrong told his own story more succinctly than I have been able to do it, and probably much better too, for he beguiled Mrs. Bell of many tears as she listened to him; and bare as the sad narrative was of events, her husband also hung upon every word of it, as if, contrary to the theory which seemed to be pretty

generally established in his neighbourhood, he thought the feelings and the sufferings of a factory-child might be capable of exciting interest.

When the history had reached its conclusion, and Michael had fairly brought himself into Mr. Bell's breakfast-parlour, he paused, and with a very eloquent look of entreaty said, "Now, sir, may I not listen to you?"

"Yes, my dear boy," replied his new friend, in the happy tone with which a kind heart inspires words calculated to give pleasure; "yes, you have much to hear, and a wonderful story it is, I promise you. But it shall be all true, Michael; so don't fancy that I am telling you a fairy tale, and that Miss Brotherton is the fairy. But first tell me, before I go any further, what sort of a boy was your brother Edward when you saw him last?"

"Oh, sir! he was the dearest, kindest fellow that ever lived!" replied Michael, his fine eyes beaming with tenderness and well-remembered love.

"But what sort of a boy was he to look at?" demanded the clergyman.

Michael closed his eyes, as if the better to contemplate the inward picture engraved on his memory.

"His face was a sweet face," said he, "but his dear limbs were crippled. He was a slighter boy than me, and could not stand the labour of the mill; and I fear, I fear," he added, shuddering, "that my poor Edward must live and die a cripple."

"What is your opinion about that, my dear?" said Mr. Bell, turning to his laughing wife.

"Why, I am inclined to think that Michael will have some difficulty in identifying his brother when he gets to him," she replied.

"Instead of being a cripple," resumed Mr Bell, "I suspect that your brother is a handsomer fellow than you are, Michael. Everything promised well for it when he took leave of us, and since then my wife has had letters from Miss Brotherton, which do not speak of any falling off in his improvement."

"Nay," said the lady, "I have had more than letters to speak for it. Shall I show him Miss Brotherton's drawing, George?"

"Most certainly, my dear: it will save me a vast deal of description, and you may trust to Miss Brotherton's pencil, Michael, as implicitly as to my words, for there never was a more faithful limner."

Mrs. Bell then opened a little portfolio, secured by a key, and drew thence a drawing in

water-colours, the composition and finish of which would have done no discredit to a professional artist. How the stout nerves of the young and athletic Michael trembled as he received it! At first his eyes seemed to fail him, the outline, the colouring, the whole group was indistinct. "I am a fool, sir," he said, letting the hand that held it drop beside him; "I positively cannot see."

"I don't much wonder at it," replied Mr. Bell; "but try again, Michael, it is worth looking at."

And so thought Michael, as he once more placed it before him, and gazed upon it with an eye as eager as that of Surrey might have been when contemplating the magic mirror that was to show him what he loved "in life and limb." The drawing represented a terrace-walk, along which ran a handsome stone balustrade, partially covered by vine-leaves; while beneath it, in the distance, stretched to a far horizon a glorious river, careering through a rich and varied landscape. All this was fair to look upon, but the boy's eyes saw it not—they were riveted upon two figures that occupied the foreground of the terrace. One of these was a slender girl, whose bright curls seemed just released from the restraint of a straw-hat which she held in her hand.

But though the head was thus uncovered, the features were not visible, for the other hand was placed upon the balustrade, over which she hung, as if in earnest contemplation of some object below. But the head of the other figure, a young man of some twenty years or so, was so turned as fully to meet the spectator's eye; and if the pencil that drew it flattered not, it was one of the handsomest that nature ever formed. The large expressive eyes, beaming with mingled softness and animation, were directed to some object out of the picture, but at no great distance, for the sweet smile that played about the mouth seemed to indicate that he was listening to pleasant words from some well-loved companion. The figure of the young man thus represented was tall and graceful. His dress was the light summer garb of a southern climate—an open book was in his hand, his straw hat lay at his feet, beside which stood a basket of newly-gathered grapes, and a small Italian greyhound, its bright eye looking in the same direction as his own, completed the group, which spoke in every part of it a sort of graceful ease and enjoyment that it was very pleasant to look upon.

"Can this indeed be my Edward?" said Michael at length, after a long silent examination of the drawing. "How beautiful!—how

noble!—how happy—how healthful—how intelligent he looks! *Is* it my own dear, pale, sickly brother? Can this be true?"

"As true as that you stand there to look at it," replied Mr. Bell. "Is there nothing in the face, Michael, that recalls your brother to you?"

"Yes, sir," he replied quickly; "the eyes and the sweet smile are so like my own Edward, that, strange as it is to see him so healthy, tall, and graceful as he is represented here, and looking, too, so greatly like a gentleman, I do quite believe that this was never drawn for any one but him: for never, never since I saw him last have I seen such eyes, or such a smile as that."

"You are quite right there, Michael. The face is one not easily forgotten, and I can trace it here, notwithstanding all the change of age and circumstance. But who do you think that slender girl may be? It seems a pity not to see her face; the form, the pretty attitude, the bright waving locks, all plainly tell that it must be worth looking at. Can you guess who it is?"

"I suppose it is Fanny Fletcher," replied Michael, colouring.

"And there, too, you are quite right. But

does it not puzzle you to think how all this has been brought about? How does it happen, think you, that those whom you remember in a state so different should now be living as you see them here, looking as if their existence were made up of sunshine and sweet air?"

"And now again I shall answer, as they say the fortune-tellers do," replied Michael, smiling, "by telling you, sir, what you have before told me. It is Miss Brotherton, whose name I well remember at Dowling Lodge: it is she who has done all this, and may God bless her for it! But yet, truly, it still seems a mystery. How did it happen, sir, that this rich young lady should have left her grand house, and all her fine acquaintance here, to go into foreign countries with two poor factory-children?"

"You may well marvel at it, Michael, for it it is no common act. But will you not think it something stranger still, if I declare, as I can do with all truth, that you are yourself the primal cause of it?" said Mr. Bell. "You look incredulous, yet so it is. Do you remember the play, Michael?"

"Sir Matthew's play?" cried Michael, burying his face in his hands. "Oh, sir, can I ever forget it?"

"It was a vastly gay thing, too," returned

Mr. Bell, smiling, "and all the performers were exceedingly admired; but you do not seem to remember it with any great pleasure?"

"Pleasure, Mr. Bell?" returned Michael, with something like a groan; "I have suffered a good deal, considering how few years I had lived before my sufferings were over; but, excepting the coming home to mother's, and finding her and Teddy gone, and, as they told me, dead—both dead! excepting then, I never was so very, *very* wretched as while Sir Matthew was making me practise for that play!"

"Do you remember the very night it was acted, when you, and he, and Dr. Crockley were in a room by yourselves, somewhere behind the scenes; do you remember, Michael, his beating and abusing you because you had cried upon the stage?"

"As well as if it had happened yesterday," replied the young man. "I had to utter false and lying praise about him, and something I am sure there was about loving him as well as my dear mother. That I could not bear; and then it was that the tears burst out, though well I knew what I should pay for shedding them."

"They were the luckiest tears that ever boy wept, so pray do not quarrel with them," replied Mr. Bell. "While you were paying for them,

as you call it, in the green-room, Miss Brotherton by accident heard and saw everything that passed; and from that hour she has never forgotten you, Michael, though more than seven long years have passed, if I mistake not, during which you have never profited by it in your own person. I will not enter now into any description of what her feelings were. An accident prevented her seeing your mother immediately, and when she did, my poor boy, you were already beyond the reach of any help. But she never ceased to inquire, by every means in her power, whither you had been conveyed, and it was then she came to me, so that it is to you I owe the pleasure of knowing one of the purest and noblest-hearted human beings it has ever been my lot to meet with. It was in consequence of —not information, for I had none to give—but of a hint I gave her as to the nature of the place, that she set off on her exploring expedition to that horrid den of sin and suffering, the Deep Valley Mills, in Derbyshire. There she met the pretty creature whom she has since adopted. Little Fanny believed that you were dead, and this was the dismal news they brought to Hoxley-lane.—Your poor mother, Michael! But let it comfort you to know that every want and every hardship were relieved from the first

hour that Miss Brotherton saw her; and she died with the comfort of knowing that her poor Edward would never have to labour more. Soon after her death Miss Brotherton took your brother to London for the purpose of consulting the most able surgeons about his lameness. Their science did not fail them; for they predicted that, with proper treatment, he would outgrow it—and so he has, completely—being at this time not only the graceful, well-made personage you see him represented there, but healthy, active, and gifted, as I hear, with a most rare intelligence. For reasons which it is not very difficult to guess, Miss Brotherton thought that she and her young *protégées* would find themselves better off on the continent than in Lancashire; and, from the time she first left Milford Park to visit London, she has never returned to it. The place is now sold, and Miss Brotherton has no longer any possessions in this neighbourhood. And now, my dear boy, I think I have told you all, excepting the exact spot where they now are; and this I cannot do, because our last letter from her informed us that they were just setting off upon a tour through Italy. She resided some time ago, for one year, at Paris, that the young people might acquire the language; but, for the most part, Germany

has been their home. It is there that your brother has received his education, and I think it very probable that it is there they will finally settle: for it is in the far-famed valley of the Rhingau that Miss Brotherton has purchased a spacious mansion, large enough, as she tells me, to accommodate half-a-dozen rich English families, with extensive and very beautiful grounds around it, and all capabilities for being converted into a delicious residence."

Here he ceased, and it was several minutes before poor Michael was capable of uttering a single word in return. The mention of his mother—the hint that she had not long survived the hearing he was dead, wrung his heart anew, with grief as fresh as if he had lost her yesterday; and, spite of his manly stature, the tears flowed silently, but plenteously, down his cheeks. Yet, even when he had conquered this, there was something so surprising in the present situation of his brother, something that, notwithstanding all the fond yearnings of his own heart, seemed to place them so widely asunder, that the joy which Mr. Bell looked for was less obvious than an expression of almost timid embarrassment, as he said,—

"Alas, sir! what shall I seem like amongst them? You speak of my dear Edward's edu-

cation in Germany—of his learning a foreign language in France—while I!—my best, and truly my only education has been looking at nature on the mountain's side as I kept sheep, and all my learning what I have gathered from a few strangely-mixed volumes that I have bought or borrowed during the last four years. How can I present myself before them? How can they welcome me?"

"Be so kind, my dear," said Mr. Bell to his wife, without immediately replying to Michael's question, "be so kind, my dear, as to find Miss Brotherton's last letter for me. I think you took possession of it, and, I doubt not, have preserved it among other treasures of the same kind."

Mrs. Bell immediately left the room, and presently returned with the letter in her hand.

"Take that letter, Michael," said Mr. Bell; "take it into the garden, my dear boy, and read it alone, and without interruption. You will find a shady seat where you may be very comfortable, and when you have finished the perusal come into my study, and tell me what you think of it."

Michael's hand trembled as he took the letter, and, silently obeying the instructions he

received, he walked out to an embowered spot where he could not be seen from the house, and, seating himself on a garden-bench, perused the following letter with a mixture of trepidation and eagerness which may easily be imagined.

"HAVE you thought it long since last you heard from me, dear friends? I hope you have, for it has seemed very long to me since last I wrote to you. But what a thief of time is occupation! I have been so very busy in drawing plans for the repairing and beautifying my old castle—you would certainly call it a castle in England—and so constantly called upon by Edward, to give my approval to his *carte du voyage* for our Italian tour, and by Fanny, to sanction her plans for our future flower-garden, and by Mrs. Tremlett, to settle some point of enormous difficulty respecting the packing up of the things to be left, and the things to be taken, that though day by day I have told myself, for at least a month past, that I was behaving most abominably in not writing, I have never before found a leisure hour to set about it. But if I have not written, I have drawn for you—witness the view from my beautiful terrace which I shall send with this letter. I wish I could have put my own phiz in it to show you how healthy

and well I look; but unfortunately, you know, there is no point of sight from which an artist can catch a peep at himself without the aid of a looking-glass, and, though I pretty nearly live upon my terrace, I have not yet taken either to sleeping or dressing there, so no mirror was at hand. But instead of myself I have given you Edward: sometimes I do feel a little glorious as I look at him, and remember the delicate pale face and feeble limbs that greeted my first sight of him in Hoxley-lane. He is now—but you will laugh at me if I attempt to describe him in words—the sketch I send is no bad likeness, and may give you a tolerably correct idea of the alteration that has taken place. As to my sweet Fanny, though the attempt would have been a bold one, I meant to have given you a likeness of her too, but her attitude was so picturesquely pretty as she stood, unconscious of what I was about, that I contented myself with the back of her curly head—you shall have her face another time.

"How can I be sufficiently thankful to Providence for having redeemed my isolated existence from the state of uselessness in which I vegetated before I met Edward Armstrong and Fanny Fletcher! Not an hour now passes by me without leaving behind it some trace of my

having advanced in the precious labour of making these two beloved beings happier. Were they merely ordinary young people, with average hearts and average capacities, I should still bless heaven, with a grateful heart, for having permitted me to be the means of changing their condition from one of great suffering to a life of innocent enjoyment. But, as it is, I know not how to be thankful enough.

"It seems to me, dear friends, however much I increase my acquaintance with other human beings, that Edward and Fanny are the noblest creatures in the world. Is it that suffering, being of necessity a part of our earthly nature, we cannot arrive at the perfect development of all our faculties without it? Where it arrives in later life, perhaps, the effect, though inwardly healthful, may not show fruits so beautiful. There is in the minds of both of them, a brightness of intelligence, and a delicious calm of temper that I have never met elsewhere. It is as if a heavy weight that had been painfully crushing them, was suddenly removed, causing all the ordinary sensations of human existence to be felt as a luxury. Young as they are, they are full of instruction, right thinking, pure feeling, and a firmness of integrity which it is the best joy of my life to contemplate—and all

this built on so firm a foundation of religious principle, that I can have no fears for its endurance. After this it would be very weak and womanish folly to dwell much on their personal advantages, or even on the peculiar charm of their manners and conversation—yet they are gifts which bring a charm, to which it is difficult to be quite insensible.

"Is it not strange, dear friends, that being such as I describe them, and having passed so large a portion of their lives together in the mutual contemplation of each other's excellence, is it not strange that they should not by this time be lovers, instead of friends? Yet such is not the case. That they love each other sincerely is most true, and I could give a thousand proofs that either would at all times gladly renounce amusement or pleasure of any kind for the sake of the other; but they are not *in love*. If I did not believe it impossible, considering the age of the parties when they parted, I should think that Fanny's little heart had been buried in the grave of Michael, the poor little fellow, whose early sufferings under the tender patronage of Sir Matthew Dowling first roused my sleepy existence into action. She cannot yet hear his name mentioned without betraying a degree of emotion that is painful to witness; and when,

as sometimes happens, Edward is taken for her brother, it seems to delight her. 'Yes, yes, indeed he is my brother! I love him as such; and if you ask him, he will tell you that I am to him a dear and loving sister.'

"I have heard her say, 'And if Edward had been asked, I do believe he would have answered, and truly too, in the same strain.'

"Edward is now twenty-one, and my pretty Fanny nineteen; but, notwithstanding the variety of captivating young people with whom they are perpetually associating, I cannot believe that the heart of either has as yet received any tender impression—though, in more cases than one, I have had reason to know that they have not been looked at with indifference. Yet, sometimes I am puzzled about Edward! I think he is less gay and joyous than he used to be. At any time, indeed, the name of Michael has ever been sufficient to bring an expression of profound and hopeless sorrow upon his fine countenance, which it wrings my heart to see; for, alas! how vain must be all my affection, all sisterly love, to help him there! But incontestably of late his spirits have been less gay than formerly. This, to tell you the truth, is the only drawback to the happiness I enjoy. Could Fanny and Edward learn to forget poor Michael,

I should hardly have a wish left; but I have little hope of this—his memory, I truly believe, is too deeply engraven on their hearts, for any subsequent events to efface it. Sometimes, when I meditate on this sadly-enduring sorrow, I fancy that I should rejoice if they were both of them to fall in love, as a cure for it. But, alas! whenever that happens, what a breaking up of happiness it will be! for I can hardly hope to find a continental wife or husband for my adopted children, sufficiently English in habits and character to permit my inviting them to make a part of my family. Yet marry abroad they must, I think, if they marry at all—for I will never by my own free will expose them to the mortification likely to ensue upon such an explanation respecting their origin, as must be the consequence of any matrimonial negotiation in England. On the continent, the ample fortunes they will possess, with their good education, and great natural advantages, will suffice to make them very desirable alliances to almost any one. But these are anxieties, which though they must come upon me sooner or later, I suppose, I shall endeavour to push from me, and forget as long as I can.

"And now I must bid you farewell; for during the next month, or perhaps longer, our

course will be directed by circumstances that we are not fully acquainted with as yet. But I will write as soon as I can tell you with certainty where your letters can reach us.

"Mrs. Tremlett, Edward, and Fanny, send affectionate greetings to you all. And should it fall in your way to see, or convey a message to poor Martha Dowling, I will beg you to tell her that I shall ever remember her with great affection and esteem. Adieu!

"Ever dear Mr. and Mrs. Bell,

"Your grateful and affectionate

"MARY BROTHERTON."

Did one reading of this epistle suffice for Michael? did two? did three? It is difficult to say, for he remained in his shady and obscure retreat so long, that Mr. Bell, notwithstanding his previous determination not to disturb him, began to think that it was time to see whether all the good news it contained had not killed him with joy. And when he reached the bench, Michael still sat with the precious letter in his hand, and his eyes fixed upon it, so that it appeared as if he had not yet finished the perusal of it. Michael looked up as Mr. Bell approached him, and immediately rising, stepped forward to receive him. It was not, however,

any wild excess of joy that his features expressed, but there were traces of very strong emotion on his countenance, and his hand trembled as he stretched it forth to receive that which was kindly extended towards him.

"You have remained too long alone, my dear boy, in this cold nook," said Mr. Bell, taking the young man's arm within his own, and leading him towards the house, "what makes you look so pale, Michael? You are not ill, I hope."

"No, sir, I think not," was the reply, "but I can hardly tell you how I feel. At one moment the idea that my dear brother still lives, and that it is possible I may again see him, hear him, hold him in my arms, seems to make me too happy to breathe; and then again, a sort of doubt and sadness takes hold upon me, and I do not feel as if it were possible I could ever make one in the happy party on the terrace."

"And why not, Michael," demanded Mr. Bell, somewhat reproachfully; "after reading that letter, can you find it in your heart to doubt that the party on the terrace would receive you joyfully?"

"Will not the happiness be too great?" cried Michael, "Oh, how can I deserve it?"

"Not by doubting the goodness or the affection of those who love you," replied Mr. Bell. "But, come, I must not preach to you now, I believe, for I suspect that you are not in a condition to profit by it. Come into the house, sit down, and grow reasonable as fast as you can, and then we will talk of the time and the mode in which you must set off to join your family: for your family they are, and will be, Michael, you may depend upon it."

"Can I throw myself upon Miss Brotherton, sir, without her permission?" demanded Michael, while his paleness was changed for a moment into a glow of the deepest red.

"I am afraid you have a very proud heart, Michael," said Mr. Bell, looking at him; "and that is not right, it is not Christian-like."

"Oh, Mr. Bell!" replied Michael, with strong feeling, "have I not already eaten the bitter bread of dependence, and can I, at my age, and with my power to labour, submit to it again?"

"You have a notion, then, young man, that benefits conferred by a Sir Matthew Dowling and a Miss Brotherton are the same thing?" said Mr. Bell.

"Not so, sir," replied Michael; "I cannot doubt that she who wrote this letter must be

both great and good, and I well know that Sir Matthew Dowling was neither. But I only know Miss Brotherton as one of the fine folks visiting at his house, and I cannot feel that I should like to start out suddenly upon her, from the tomb, as it would seem, appearing to expect that she should adopt me, too, as she has done my brother Edward."

"Well, Michael, I must not blame you for this, because I believe it is very natural: yet, nevertheless, I feel quite sure that you will forget all such notions when you see Miss Brotherton," returned Mr. Bell, smiling.

Michael shook his head; but he returned the smile, though rather languidly, and when they had reached the house, and were again seated in the study, he said, "What does Miss Brotherton mean, sir, by calling Miss Martha Dowling 'poor Martha'? I trust that no misfortune has befallen her? She was very kind to me, and I shall always love her, although her name *is* Dowling."

"I believe she deserves it, Michael," returned Mr. Bell; "and, by the by, you have it in your power to show your love, and do her a great kindness by the very simple process of letting her know that you are alive. Poor girl! She has suffered dreadfully from believing that she caused your death by the advice she gave to

your mother about signing your indentures, and I fancy that letting her know that you did not perish in consequence would be conferring a real blessing on her."

"Dear, good Miss Martha!" exclaimed Michael: "how well do I remember the walk we took together when she went to Hoxley-lane, to give my dearest mother that advice! She did it for my good, and for my good it would have been, if what she advised had been the thing she thought it! I owe her still, notwithstanding the misery she brought me to, the deepest gratitude: for her kind and careful teaching during the short time I was in her father's house first gave me the ambition and the hope to learn, and, spite of my degraded condition, I have never lost sight of it; and this it is which, if any thing can, may reconcile me to presenting myself as a poor shepherd boy before my well-taught brother."

"You are right there, Michael," replied Mr. Bell: "it is very clear to me that you have profited greatly by the feelings so inspired, notwithstanding the adverse circumstances in which you were placed during the four terrible years passed in the Deep Valley; and such feelings, I can tell you, will make a vast difference in the

degree of happiness you are likely to enjoy in a re-union with your brother."

"And to Fanny Fletcher, too!" said Michael, with the eagerness of reviving hope heightening his colour, and darting its brightness from his eye—"to Fanny Fletcher, too, I owe the suggestion of thoughts which have saved me from being too utterly degraded to meet her again with pleasure. It is to Martha Dowling, surely, that I owe all the little book-learning I have been able to acquire, as well as the power of writing down the thoughts and meditations to which it has given rise; but it was Fanny who made me feel that, however lowly our condition and state on earth, we may yet retain as good a right as any of the kings of it to open our hearts before God, and ask for His Spirit to help us. How many mornings have I watched the sun rise, how many evenings have I seen it set in glory behind the mountain tops, and thought as I lay amidst the heather, and worshipped its Almighty Maker, that, but for her, I should never have known the comfort of loving and trusting, as well as of adoring him. It was that dear patient little girl who taught me this, and perhaps I may yet live to thank her for it."

"I trust you will, my dear boy," replied Mr.

Bell, touched with the earnest energy of the boy's manner; "I trust you will, Michael; and if I mistake her not, she will receive such thanks as a very welcome reward for all the pains she took to comfort you. Such kindness as she showed you, is, indeed

'————twice blest,
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes;'

and I doubt not that she, as well as yourself, has been the better for it, from that time to this."

"May I look once more at that drawing, sir?" said Michael, with some little embarrassment.

"There it is, Michael," said the clergyman, smiling, and once more laying it before him. "Were it not that I think you will so soon see the dear originals, and that we shall not, I would ask my wife to give it you."

"I think I shall learn every line, and every shade of it by rote," said Michael, "if I do but look at it a few minutes longer. There, sir," he added, after an earnest gaze, and resigning it into his hands, "I feel as if it were my own now." Then, after one deep sigh, he seemed to rouse himself; and, as if endeavouring to shake off some feeling that oppressed him, he said

"But you have not told me yet, sir, the reason why Miss Brotherton calls my first benefactress '*poor* Martha!'"

"I am sorry to say," replied Mr. Bell, "that there are more reasons than one for applying that pitying epithet to Miss Martha Dowling. In the first place, she is greatly out of health, poor girl; and in the next, her father's affairs are said to be in a very tottering condition, in consequence of his having overloaded himself with a greater quantity of spun cotton than he can get any sale for. He is said to have lent out money, too, on some speculation which has not answered; and, in short, that it is rather a nice question whether he will be able to get through his difficulties or not. Another misfortune is, that Sir Matthew, as soon as he possibly could after the death of his first wife, thought proper to marry the Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, who, strange to say, thought proper also to marry him; and it is said also that poor Miss Martha, who is the eldest of the daughters unmarried, is not permitted to enjoy much peace under the rule of her noble step-mother."

"Lady Clarissa Shrimpton?" said Michael, with the air of one to whom some long-lost image is brought back—"Lady Clarissa Shrimpton? Why, surely, that was the name of the tall,

thin woman who had to practise the laying her bony hand upon my unfortunate little head when the terrible play was about!"

"I dare say it was," said Mr. Bell: "but, at any rate, Lady Clarissa Shrimpton is now Lady Clarissa Dowling."

"Poor Miss Martha!—And she is out of health too? How can I manage to pay my duty to her, Mr. Bell, without running the risk of being recognised by Sir Matthew, as the unfornate boy who escaped from the Deep Valley? He would be able, I suppose, to make me serve out my time?"

"I do not think he would attempt it just now, Michael," was the consolatory reply. "Thank God!" continued Mr. Bell, "there has been a good deal said of late concerning the abominations of the Deep Valley Factory, and I don't much think Sir Matthew Dowling would run the risk of having it proved that he had kidnapped a boy away to it, in the style he managed you. I should have no fear whatever of your presenting yourself at Dowling Lodge: only I think it is ten to one her ladyship will not let you get a sight of Miss Martha without her being present,—unless you were to write a line to the young lady first, and then perhaps she might contrive it."

Michael now rose to take his leave, offering, with a fervour that was very touching, his earnest thanks for the generous kindness with which he had been received; but he resisted all the hospitable efforts made to retain him as a guest. He had need, he said, to be alone, that he might bring his mind to such a state as should enable him to sustain the wonderful change in his prospects with something like fortitude and rational composure. There was more real kindness and true sympathy in the manner of accepting this excuse than the most pressing offers of hospitality could have shown; and Michael, after involuntarily kissing the hand stretched out to bid him farewell, took his departure from the clergyman's house with a heart full of thankfulness to God and man.

CHAPTER VII.

Michael calls his wisdom to council, and the points to be discussed puzzle him—An early walk—An old friend with a changed face.

To describe Michael Armstrong's feelings as he took his solitary way along what seemed to him the most unfrequented fields he could find would be both a difficult and unnecessary task. That his heart swelled with thankfulness and joy cannot be doubted; yet there was a vagueness and uncertainty as to what he ought immediately to do, which made him anxious and sad, even in the midst of hope and joy. The small sum he had been able to save from his wages had been spent, or very nearly so, since he set out upon his eventful expedition. He had already accepted a loan from the friendly old coachman of Miss Brotherton, and he shrunk from the idea of contracting more debts, while unable to say with certainty when they should be paid. How then was he to reach his brother in his happy distant home? And where and how was he to pass the anxious interval that must of necessity intervene

before he could even know to what point he should direct his pilgrim steps, even had he the means of setting forth?

The path he had taken proved to be a short cut leading into the high road from Fairly to Ashleigh, and on quitting the fields he found himself close to the door of a public-house which he was tempted to select for his shelter as long as he remained in the neighbourhood, both because it was lonely, and because it was humble. Having entered there, bespoken a bed, and made a very frugal repast, he inquired the distance to Dowling Lodge, and finding that it was greater than he could traverse on foot with any hope of returning in decent time to occupy his newly-taken lodging, he resolved to wait till the following morning, when, by setting off at daybreak, he might be able to make his visit to Martha, and perhaps report the result of it to Mr. Bell before he slept.

His mind had too much on which to employ itself for him to feel the afternoon a long one: an orchard close behind the little inn afforded him shade and soft turf whereon to sit or lie, or to pace backwards and forwards, with unequal steps, as he meditated on the chances for and against his ever being one in the happy, thrice-happy party described by Miss Brotherton. Nor

had he wearied of these exciting but most anxious thoughts, when the moon, and the stars, and the heavy dew warned him at length that the day was gone, and night come. And then he remembered that, in order to follow Mr. Bell's advice, he must prepare himself with a letter to Miss Martha, which it would be necessary to write before he went to bed. Fortunately his *hotel* was able to furnish the needful implements, and after a little reflection, he penned the following note:—

"A poor lad, to whom Miss Martha Dowling once showed much charitable kindness, is now waiting at the park gates, to know if he may pay his duty to her. He takes the freedom of asking for this favour, because he has been told that she would be pleased to hear he was alive and well."

Having directed this to Miss Martha Dowling, and sealed it in the best manner he could, he retired to his little bed in a state of mind that hovered between inexpressible felicity and anxiety that he was hardly able to bear.

He was afoot in time to hear the lark's first overture on the following morning; and his spirits, cheered by the bracing influence of the delicious hour, and by the sound sleep which had

preceded it, enabled him to breakfast on a slice of brown bread, bespoken the night before, and laid ready for him, with a draught of icy-cold water from a neighbouring well, without any mixture of melancholy, though he thought the while of all the dangers and difficulties he might have to encounter ere he stood beside his Edward on the beautiful terrace to which his dreams had transported him so easily.

Michael was a stout walker, and had reached the well-remembered precincts of Dowling Lodge soon after the earliest servants were stirring. He had made up his mind to be the bearer of his own letter, and accordingly, having shown the address to the woman at the lodge as a reason for being permitted to enter, he approached the stately mansion by the road which led to the offices, and intrusting his epistle to the first female he encountered, requested her to deliver it to Miss Martha without delay.

"Why she bean't up yet," said the girl, looking at him, however, with the good-humoured smile with which light-hearted young damsels are wont to greet such very handsome lads as our Michael.

"But perhaps you will be so good as to let her have it as soon as she is awake?" he replied, returning the smile.

"Well, poor thing, and that may be now, most likely," returned the girl, "for her cough often wakes her before this time. Will you wait for an answer?"

"I won't trouble the servants by staying here," replied Michael; "but, if you please, you may tell the young lady that I will walk up and down the road till she can let me have it. Does Miss Martha walk out early in the mornings, as she used to do?" he added.

"That's just what she likes best, poor thing!" replied the girl. "But you needn't be afeard that she's gone out already, for if she had, I should have been sure to have seen her, for she never has the great door opened for her at this time of day, for fear of disturbing my lady, who always lies unaccountable late."

"And does Sir Matthew rise early now?" demanded Michael with some anxiety.

"He?—not he! He eats and sleeps like a pig, they say; but he is grumpier than ever he was, both to men and maids, too, since he married the new lady. I wonder as I never happened to see you before, as you seem to know 'em all so well!"

"It is several years since I was last here," returned Michael; "but run up stairs with it, there's a dear girl, will you? because I want to get my answer and be off."

"You had better stop here till I come down again," replied his good-natured messenger, "instead of walking up and down the road, without knowing whether there's an answer or no:—sit down in the kitchen, and I'll be back in no time."

And into the kitchen he went—the self-same kitchen which just eight years before had been the scene of his painful examination by Sir Matthew Dowling's servants. He remembered the room perfectly; could have pointed out the exact spot where the awful housekeeper sat, and the place where he had himself stood, with no better champion to sustain his courage than the greasy kitchen-maid, whose pitying broad face, bent over him, he recollected as perfectly as if it had beamed upon him but the day before. He was still deeply revolving these interesting reminiscences, and the strange contrast they offered to his present hopes, when his envoy returned—"Miss Martha wants to know your name, young man," she said; "but she is getting up, and will be walking in the park, as usual, she says, presently, so it is likely enough that she will give you the answer herself."

"Very well," replied Michael, perfectly satisfied: "good morning!—I am very much obliged to you."

'But you haven't told me your name, and Miss Martha says that she should like to know it."

"My name isn't one that would make any difference," he replied; "so I won't trouble you to go up again about that—good by!" And without waiting for any further discussion, he walked off, exceedingly well pleased at having arranged the wished-for *tête-à-tête* so satisfactorily. The noble dimensions of the park enabled Michael to select a space amply sufficient for his promenade, which was neither within sight of the mansion nor the lodge, and ere he had made many turns upon it, he perceived the lady he wished to see approaching him.

He could not doubt that it was Martha, for at that hour of the morning none other was at all likely to be there; but she was too much altered for him to recognise her in any degree. He thought she was taller than he had expected to see her, but at any rate she was greatly thinner, and so delicately pale, that her appearance was rather a contrast than a resemblance to what he had expected to meet. She was already near him when he turned upon the path, and met her. He stopped, took off his hat, and bowed respectfully.

"You are Miss Martha Dowling, ma'am?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Martha, "that is my name; but when did I see you before, young man? I do not know you."

"It is a great many years, Miss Martha—but I can never forget your kindness."

The pale cheek of Martha was tinted with a vivid blush, as she exclaimed, "If it were possible—if I did not know that he was dead! But this is nonsense," she added, recovering her composure. "I quite forget your person, young man," she continued, after a pause: "But if I have ever done you any service, I am glad of it. Perhaps if you tell me your name I may remember the circumstances to which you allude."

"Oh, Miss Martha!" replied Michael, "I am afraid my name will startle you, and therefore I do not like to speak it. But I think it came into your head just now, only you stopped short, and said it was impossible."

"Can it be Michael Armstrong that I see?" demanded Martha, in an agitated voice.

"It is indeed, Miss Martha!" he replied; "it is Michael Armstrong, come back to thank you for all your great kindness to him."

"My kindness to Michael Armstrong!" she

exclaimed. "Alas! it was I who occasioned all his sufferings, and, as I have thought for many years, his death. How is it you have been saved, Michael? How is it you have escaped from the horrid place to which I was the cause of your being sent?"

"My dear Miss Martha," returned Michael, greatly affected by her look of ill-health, and by the agitation she displayed, for tears were trickling fast down her pale cheeks—"My dear Miss Martha," he said, "*I* know, if nobody else does, the kind motive that you had for every word you spoke; and was it not I myself that said I wanted to go, Miss Martha, when we walked together from here to poor mother's house? Never, never can I thank you enough for all your goodness then, as well as at all other times, from the very first moment that ever I saw you."

"Thank God!" cried poor Martha, fervently clasping her hands, and raising her eyes to heaven, "you know not, Michael, what a load you have taken from my heart! I have for years lived under the dreadful weight of believing myself to be your murderer. The thought has haunted me by night, and rarely quitted me by day. And my poor father too! This crime at least he has not to answer for!"

Michael could not help thinking—though for worlds he would not have lessened her pious satisfaction by uttering the thought—that though he had escaped with life from the terrible sufferings to which he had been exposed, he owed Sir Matthew but little gratitude for it. Fortunately, however, for his veracity, he was not called upon to answer this observation, for Martha immediately added,

"Does Miss Brotherton know that you are alive, Michael?"

"No, Miss Martha, she does not," he replied; "my brother Edward is living with her in some place abroad, and till yesterday I have existed in the dismal belief that *he* was dead, and that I had not a single relation in the whole world."

"And where are you living, Michael? What is your home now? And how did you escape from the dismal place to which you were sent as an apprentice?"

In answer to this, Michael related, as briefly as he could contrive to do it, all that had happened to him; confessing freely that he had run away, and that he supposed he was liable to be sent back again to work out his time, if Sir Matthew discovered that he was alive, and if it were his pleasure to do it.

"We will not talk of anything of that kind, Michael," said Martha, a bright blush again visiting her cheek. "It would not be prudent, certainly, for you to make yourself known here —and I particularly desire that you will not do it. I am grateful—oh! most grateful—for your coming to tell me that the dismal news of your death was not true; but now that you have set my heart at rest on that score, do not come here again, Michael. Lady Clarissa is very particular about every body that comes to the house—and —in short—though I shall always have the greatest regard for you, Michael, I would a great deal rather that you did not come to Dowling Lodge again."

Michael perfectly understood, though it was evident she would not avow it, that poor Martha had fears for his safety, should Sir Matthew discover him; and without giving her the slightest reason to suppose that he saw this, he assured her that he was going immediately from Ashleigh without any intention of returning to it. Martha then looked at her watch, and seeing that there was still above an hour to spare before the usual time at which the family came down stairs, ventured to seat herself on the trunk of a newly-felled tree, while she questioned the youth, for whom she still felt the strongest interest, as to

what his projects were, and when and how he thought of leaving England to join his brother. With frank and touching simplicity, Michael entered freely into all his harassing doubts and difficulties—confessed that he had not a shilling in the world that he could call his own, and, worse still, that he could not help feeling a strong repugnance to throwing himself wholly on the charity of Miss Brotherton, for no other reason in the world than because she had nobly provided for his brother. "To know that Edward is alive, and not endeavour to see him is impossible," he continued. "But I would fain earn money enough, if it were possible, to enable me to get to him without being chargeable to her, and once within reach of him—once near enough to his dwelling-place to know that we need never be many days asunder, I should not fear but that I might earn my living, without being indebted to charity for it. I was always stronger than Edward, you know, Miss Martha, and there is no reason because he lives an idle life, dear fellow, that I should do so too."

"Michael!" she replied, her whole countenance lighted up with the most animated expression of pleasure, "my dear Michael Armstrong! your coming here is certainly the greatest blessing that Heaven could have sent me. I cannot

tell you, and you can never know, all I have suffered from believing you were dead, and from *knowing* that I had been the cause of great and terrible suffering to you; and that, too, wholly owing to the trust which you and your poor mother reposed in me! May you never, my dear boy, know what it is to have a conscience burdened as mine has been! Be very sure that it was worse than any thing you could have suffered at the Deep Valley, Michael! When you see Mary Brotherton, tell her that I owned this to you—and perhaps she may think, at last, that she judged me rather more harshly than I deserved."

"If she judged you harshly at all she was very wrong," replied Michael, warmly. "People should know before they judge. Nobody who really knew you *could* judge you harshly."

"I had rather that kind sentence came from your lips, Michael, than from those of any other human being. If *you* can say it, and mean it too, as I am sure you do, who is there living that can have a right to say the contrary? Yet this is not my only pleasure: I happen to have the power—and I bless my poor father for it—of making some little atonement for the years of suffering that I so unwittingly caused you. From the day we were each of us fifteen, we have

received an allowance of sixty pounds a-year for dress; and though I really never wanted one-half so much as my sisters, my father, who has ever been a kind father to me, has always insisted upon my having the same; and at the marriage of my two elder sisters he gave me a hundred pounds each time, that I might be smart. But I have no taste for finery, Michael, it always made me melancholy; so I am very rich—I really do not know how rich, for I have always kept on laying the bank-notes that I did not want in a drawer, and I have never counted them. Think if it will not be a pleasure for me now to open that drawer, and give you all that is in it! Oh, with what different feelings shall I go to bed to-night from any I have felt for years past! I am sure there must be enough to take you to Italy, or wherever else Miss Brotherton may be gone, and to set you up in some little business into the bargain. Wait here only ten minutes, my dear Michael, and I will return with my treasure—a real treasure now, and for the first time that I ever thought it so!"

Martha had risen from her seat as she spoke, and literally before Michael could recover from his astonishment sufficiently to answer her, she was already at some distance from him. He had by no means settled to his satisfaction the

question of whether he ought or ought not to strip the generous Martha of her little hoard, when she again appeared. But she looked hurried, and out of breath.

"Make haste, Michael, dear Michael!" she said, with much agitation. "For pity's sake let me not be again plunged in all the misery of self-reproach from which I have so recently escaped. Take this parcel, Michael! Nay, never stay to count them! My father has left his room—may have inquired for me—and even now be following me. Bless you, Michael! Bless you! Go, go, for God's sake! and leave the country as quick as possible."

With these words she turned from him, and with a step too rapid for her state of health, and plainly showing her extreme anxiety, she hastily retreated towards the house.

Though, after hearing Mr. Bell's decided opinion that no further danger was to be feared from Sir Matthew Dowling, Michael would himself have felt not the least desire to run away from him, yet it was impossible not to perceive that Martha was of a different mind, and that for some reason or the other she was exceedingly anxious that he should not remain near Dowling Lodge, or, in other words, within her father's reach. Whether she were right or wrong, in

fancying that it was necessary for his safety that he should keep out of the way, he felt that it would be cruel to oppose her; and with the unexamined roll of bank notes thrust into his coat-pocket, he gave but one farewell look at the retreating drapery of poor Martha, and then with rapid strides, and thoughts so full of the scene which had just passed, that he followed the right path rather mechanically than from judgment, he set off upon his return to the humble lodging he had secured for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

Michael grows rich, and takes a very delightful walk back to Westmoreland—His preparations for a longer journey are suddenly stopped—He makes a painful visit, but meets many old acquaintances.

THE morning's walk had been a long one, even for Michael Armstrong, and right glad was he to find himself again in the neatly-sanded kitchen of his little inn, with a loaf and cheese before him, of sufficient dimensions to resist any attacks he could make upon them. A moderate proportion of beer in addition to the solid meal these afforded refreshed him so effectually, that he determined to take his leave of Mr. Bell that night, preparatory to setting off on his return to Westmoreland on the following morning, in order to bid farewell to his good old master there. On the subject of Martha's bank-notes he meant to be entirely guided by the advice of the clergyman, being equally fearful of offending, or rather of paining, their generous owner, by refusing to accept them, or of depriving her of

what might be hereafter useful by agreeing to do so.

"I have seen Miss Martha, sir!" were his first words on entering Mr. Bell's parlour, and both look and accent showed that the interview had been an interesting one. "But, alas! she is greatly altered," he added, restraining with difficulty the tears that rose to his eyes. "I fear she is very ill—but she was glad—oh, so glad to see me, sir! She has been fretting, poor dear young lady, under the false notion that she had been to blame about me; but, thank God! I think she knows better now; and perhaps when her mind is at ease again she may recover health. I can't bear to think how pale and thin she is grown, and all about me, to whom she was the best and kindest friend that ever poor boy had. And see, sir, what she has done now," continued Michael, drawing forth the roll of notes from his pocket. "Here is a large sum of money, I believe. She did not rightly know how much it was herself, she told me, because she had kept on putting by what she did not want, and had never counted how much it came to—and I'm sure I have not counted it either; but whether it is little or much, I don't feel quite certain whether I ought to take it."

Mr. Bell smiled at the unusual manner in

which the rich-looking but carelessly-packed roll of paper had passed from one hand to the other. Before he examined the contents, he questioned Michael as to all that the generous-hearted girl had said to him on bestowing it; and the young man's faithful answers soon convinced him that there would be little kindness to the self-reproaching Martha in refusing a donation which she evidently considered as an atonement, and which would, he doubted not, by its application to Michael's necessities, do more towards healing her wounded mind than any other thing whatever.

"You must not refuse the gift, Michael," said Mr. Bell, after hearing his narrative to the end. "I do not wonder, little as she has been to blame in the matter, at her having suffered greatly for all that she innocently made you suffer; nor am I at all surprised, since it was in her power to do so, that she should wish to make you this atonement. It comes at a lucky moment, my dear boy; for not only will it enable you to present yourself before Miss Brotherton without throwing yourself, as you said yesterday, upon her charity, but I suspect it may go far in assisting your hopes of entering into some business which may enable you to support yourself."

Mr. Bell then opened the bundle of notes, and

found that they amounted to rather more than five hundred pounds,—a sum which to Michael appeared so enormous, that he uttered something like a remonstrance against the opinion which advised his appropriating the whole.

"Did you not tell me, sir," he said, "that Sir Matthew Dowling's affairs were not considered to be in so flourishing a state as they had been? And may not this money be wanted by Miss Martha in case he should really become involved in difficulties?"

"I think there is no danger of her wanting it, Michael," returned Mr. Bell. "Let what will happen, I have no doubt that Sir Matthew will be able to secure sufficient from the relics of his enormous wealth to maintain his family in easy circumstances. A sum like this, my dear boy, is but a drop in such an ocean."

Michael resisted no longer, and this point being settled, his plan of operations was soon arranged. In deference to Martha's fears for his safety, he decided not to visit his good friend Richard Smithson, at Milford, Mr. Bell undertaking to settle the matter of the loan, and moreover to convey to the kind-hearted man the assurances of Michael's well-doing, of his gratitude, and hearty good wishes. The letter from the travellers, which was to settle the happy Mi-

chael's road, would probably arrive within a week or two, and Mr. Bell recommended that, having paid his farewell visit to Westmoreland, he should return to Fairly, and there equip himself in such a manner as would be suitable for presenting himself before Miss Brotherton. Mr. Bell agreed to take the custody of his treasure till his return; and with his bundle again on his shoulder, and five pounds in his pocket, Michael set off to walk over the fells and moors he had to traverse, with a lightness of spirit that seemed to strew the desert with flowers, and made every blast that blew upon him as soft and sweet as the gales of Araby. It was not the least, perhaps, of his pleasures, as he strode sturdily along, to compare his present walk with that which had conducted him from the Deep Valley to Ashleigh four years before.

The suffering, the terror, and the final agony of that expedition could not come over his mind, however, without throwing a shade over his gladness; but it chastened, without obscuring, the bright combination of objects that glowed in the prospect before him; and, altogether, it would be difficult to find any walk on record more replete with enjoyment than this of Michael to the humble mountain home that had so kindly sheltered him.

It was with a very flattering mixture of joy and sorrow that the good statesman and his family accepted Michael's farewell, and listened to his happy hopes; and it was amidst blessings and hearty good wishes that once again he sallied forth to wend his way for the last time over the mountains, and bid a fond and lingering adieu to his beloved lakes and lawns. He felt that those had been to him as teachers and preachers, elevating his heart and imagination, and preparing him, more effectually perhaps than any other school could have done, for the different sphere of life in which he now hoped to move.

On reaching Fairly he found that a letter had arrived from Miss Brotherton, enclosing one to Martha Dowling, which had been forwarded immediately; and which, by what the kind-hearted heiress said to her Fairly friends, seemed to have been written in consequence of the reports which had reached her respecting the failing fortunes of Sir Matthew. Miss Brotherton was at Nice, where it was her purpose to remain for some months. To Nice, then, the thrice-happy Michael prepared to go. A respectable wardrobe and all other necessary equipments were easily procured in the neighbourhood, his place to London taken, and all things ready for

his setting off, save that he still expected an answer to a very cautiously-worded epistle which he had ventured to address to Martha, informing her that he was setting off for Nice, and that any letter or message she might wish to convey to Miss Brotherton should be carefully delivered by her faithful humble servant, M. A.

Michael was at breakfast with his kind and hospitable friends, when a lad, bearing great marks of hasty travelling in his appearance, made his way into the room, and with a look that seemed to prophesy eventful tidings, if he were but asked for them, delivered a letter to Mr. Bell. This proved, however, to be only an empty cover, inclosing one to Michael, which was handed to him, while the eyes of his host and hostess fixed themselves with some anxiety on his face. Michael tore open the despatch, and changed colour as he read it. Then, giving an intelligible glance at the messenger, who ceased not to wipe his forehead with one arm, while he held his hat squeezed to his side with the other, he said, "I should like to speak to you about this, Mr. Bell."

"Go into the kitchen, my lad," said the clergyman, "and get some breakfast. You shall know when the answer is ready."

Though evidently disappointed at being thus

dismissed unquestioned, the boy consoled himself with the hope of a kitchen audience, and making his reverence, retired.

"What in the world have you got there, Michael?" demanded Mr. Bell. "Not good news, I am afraid?"

"No, indeed, sir," replied Michael, "very far from it. It is from Miss Martha Dowling, who seems to be in great distress."

"Read it to us, my good fellow, will you? If there is no reason to the contrary."

"What is written here, sir, cannot long be a secret from any body. This is what she says:

"Dear Michael!

"Pray come to me at Dowling Lodge directly. There is no longer any danger to be feared from my poor dear father, for he is very, very ill—and I think you can be useful to me, which I am sure you will be if you can. Alas, Michael, you will witness a dreadful scene! My poor father has kept every thing secret to the very last; meaning, I am sure, to prepare his family for it as well as he could. I could not think what it was made him send all my sisters away to Arabella and Harriett. The two little ones, indeed, as well as the three youngest boys, are all at school, so that I am the only child he has left

with him, my elder brothers being all away in their different professions. I tell you all this now, Michael, because I shall, I suppose, have no time to say any thing but on necessary business when you come here. Do not delay! I am sure you can be useful to me.

"In great sorrow, your friend,

"MARTHA DOWLING."

"Poor girl! This is sad indeed!" cried Mr. Bell. "I imagine, though she does not explain herself, that her father's affairs are fallen into confusion. Yet I cannot guess what you can do for her. However, you must go immediately, of course; and you had better hire a chaise, that no time may be lost. And I would advise you, Michael, to take with you the pocket-book which Mrs. Bell packed up for you so carefully last night. I fear that it is but too likely your prediction will be fulfilled already, and that the poor young lady may be glad to have some of her notes returned."

"Thank God that I was not gone!" replied Michael, fervently. "It will be the greatest pleasure of my life if I can be useful to her!"

Little time was lost in setting off; and certainly much before his arrival had been hoped for by Martha, Michael, who left his post-chaise

at a public-house near the lodge, was walking towards the mansion by the same path in which he had so lately parted from her. On entering the kitchen, the scene which met his eyes explained at the very first glance the nature of the business carrying on upon the premises. A number of men were standing about, some few occupied in sticking slips of paper inscribed "Lot No. —," upon a variety of articles which appeared to have been collected there for the purpose. Others, with black canvass aprons and paper-caps, were coming and going with no very apparent purpose; while another set, with cold meat and beer flagons before them, sat round a small table in a corner, discoursing upon themes which appeared to occasion them much merriment.

But, among all these, there was not one that looked like a servant of the house; and, taking advantage of the confusion which seemed to license the freedom, he walked on without speaking to any of them, and determined to trust to his memory for finding the small morning-parlour which used to contain all poor Martha's little literary personalties, and in which all his reading and writing lessons had been received.

Neither his recollection nor his conjecture deceived him: he found the apartment he

"I tell you, Martha, that you talk like a fool

sought, and on opening the door, discovered Martha sitting there. But she was not, as he had hoped to find her, alone. On a sofa placed opposite the windows sat a figure, bolt-upright in the middle of it; with a sofa-table before her entirely covered with trinkets, delicate Sevres china, miniature bronzes, and other valuable nick-nacks. A quantity of cotton-wool lay on the sofa beside her, and her long lean fingers were actively employed in selecting the most precious articles, enveloping them in the wool, and then cramming them into a large basket that stood before her, sometimes selecting one, either smaller or more precious than the rest, and thrusting it into her pocket or up her sleeve. A large Indian screen was spread before the door, which induced Michael, on hearing a voice that certainly was not that of his friend Martha, to remain unseen long enough to decide whether his entrance would be likely to occasion her any embarrassment.

"I tell you, Martha, that you talk like a fool, and that is what you always were, and always will be!" said the upright lady in a shrill voice, but in a tone that she was endeavouring to reduce to a whisper. "What right can any one of these horrid dirty fellows have to what is mine, I should like to know? I am not going to be

made bankrupt, or sent to jail, or have my property seized, because your abominable, wicked, low-born, brutal, treacherous, false father has been found out, and is going to be treated as he deserves. As for you, and all the rest of your family, there is nothing to be said or done, I suppose, but to submit, and just do what you can to get your bread. With such blood as you have got in your veins, there will be no great harm done if you were all to go out as housemaids and footmen. The thing happens among low people continually, if the father gets into distress, but I should like to know who ever heard of a woman of quality, the daughter of an earl, being treated in the same sort of unceremonious way?"

"But indeed, Lady Clarissa, it will be a great deal worse for my father if it is found out that his wife has been endeavouring to secrete property," said Martha.

"His wife, indeed! A pretty sort of husband he has made me, hasn't he? Having my noble arms painted on his paltry carriages, and engraven on his plate, not a single ounce of which had been twenty years in his possession; and then, vulgar wretch! insisting upon seeing my housekeeper's account, for fear I should save any thing out of the money he allowed me! Pitiful cheating, brutal, manufacturing savage! But,

thank God, my slavery is at an end!—To-morrow will see me many a good mile on my way to Scotland! The monsters say I may take my clothes and my money—and my clothes and my money I will take, I promise you, Miss Martha: so I would really advise you to go and collect your own things, and see them put together decently. You may be able to sell some of them perhaps, which might be very useful, and that would be spending your time much more profitably, and decently too, than sitting there lecturing me upon what I may, and what I may not take. I shall take everything that belongs to me, and there's an end of that; and I wish to my heart you would just go away and leave me in peace."

"Did I not know, Lady Clarissa, that my father would suffer for it," said Martha, rising, "I would not have troubled you with my remonstrances; but I am certain that you are now occupied in abstracting things that of right belong to my poor father's creditors, and if it is discovered, it may be the means of their refusing his certificate, and he may be thrown into a gaol for life."

"And where could he be better, Miss Martha? I am sure that I don't know. My belief is that he is mad, or going to be mad, and I don't see

but a jail is as comfortable as a mad-house, and as it must be a great deal cheaper, it will suit his circumstances a great deal better. I wish you would go, child, and see if there is such a thing in the house as a basin of soup for my luncheon. I may ring and ring, but there is not a creature that will answer the bell now."

Martha made no reply, but she rose from her chair, and Michael stepped back into the passage, that she might not meet him within hearing of her selfish step-mother.

"You are come, then!" exclaimed the poor girl, on catching sight of him. "This is very kind of you, Michael! If you will walk this way with me—there is nobody in the great drawing-room now—I will explain my reasons for sending for you."

Michael followed her to the well-remembered drawing-room, which had so often witnessed the display of Sir Matthew's munificent charity, by showing him off to all the neighbourhood. The recollection was very hateful to him, yet the right-hearted lad felt a pang as he accompanied his benefactress into this greatly-altered scene of former splendour. The whole house was under preparation for a sale by auction, and nothing could exceed the speaking state of gilded desolation which this fine room exhibited.

"Never mind the confusion, Michael! Just step over these curtains—we can sit down up in that corner of the room—take care of the mirrors, my dear boy! Surely they have thrown these costly things about more heedlessly than was necessary," said poor Martha, as she led the way rather over, than through the scattered mass of splendid furniture with which the room was strewed.

"It is strange, Michael," she resumed, as soon as they had seated themselves in a clear space of six feet wide, where two chairs were standing near one of the windows, "it is strange, most strange, that you should be the only person that I could think of to assist my poor father in his misery! You, who have suffered so severely from—from his displeasure. But I found out, Michael, that you had a kind, good talk to me of your mother and poor Teddy—it was that which made me take notice of you then, and it is that which makes me ask for your assistance now."

"And happy and thankful shall I be if I can do you any good, Miss Martha!" replied Michael eagerly. "I have brought back the notes, all but about twelve pounds, that has been laid out for me. It is a very large sum, Miss Martha, and I trust it will be useful to you."

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"I do not want it, my dear boy!" replied Martha, smiling through her tears, "but I am glad to find that I was not mistaken in you. No, Michael, let me still, under all circumstances, have the unspeakable comfort of believing that I have been able to make you some little atonement for all you have gone through from my ill-judged and ignorant advice. You would make no difficulty about keeping what has been accumulated out of my hatred for silks and satins, Michael, if you could guess the extraordinary good it has done me to know that you are alive and well, and less destitute than you would have been had you never seen me. I thought I was dying, Michael, before your little note reached me, but now, strange to say, spite of all the calamities which have fallen upon my family since, I feel as if I might still live long enough to be useful to my poor father. Alas! Michael, his condition is very dreadful! For some months past I have perceived a great alteration in him. His memory has failed him, and at times his temper has been so variable that I have seen him violently angry and very intemperate in his language one minute, and enduring the insolence of Lady Clarissa, with the meekness of a child, the next. And now—in short, Michael, I greatly fear that his reason is

shaken by the misfortunes that have fallen upon him : he has kept all his commercial disasters so completely to himself, that not even his most confidential agents were at all aware of their extent, and I therefore hope that if I can contrive to remove him from this melancholy scene his mind will be relieved by feeling that the worst is over, and that I may have the exceeding happiness of seeing him restored to reason and to health."

"And in what way then can I be useful to you, my dear Miss Martha? I dare not combat your will, but it seems to me that if his creditors are stripping his house in this way, such a sum as you have put into my hands might be very useful to him," said Michael.

"And so it would, certainly, my good friend, if he had not provided for the exigencies of this terrible moment, by having a large sum of ready money in the house,—a fact which he has confided to me only," replied Martha. "His marriage with Lady Clarissa," she continued, "has been a greater misfortune to him, Michael, than any losses in his business could possibly be. She has led him a most wretched life—constantly keeping his high spirit in subjection by threatening him to bring her brother upon him, if he treated her with any want of respect; and

my poor father's reverence for rank and title is such, that he has submitted to her in everything. But during the terrible fortnight that has passed since the disclosure of his ruin, her conduct has been perfectly frightful; and I feel quite certain that when she has taken herself off to Scotland, which she intends to do to-morrow, my father will feel so greatly relieved, that the very best effects upon his mind may be hoped for from it. What I want you to do for me, Michael, is this: you must procure a post-chaise to be at the lodge-gates to-night at twelve. The men who are left in charge of the house get both tired and tipsy before that hour, and will be in bed and asleep; and then, I think, I shall be able to get my poor father away from all the irritating objects which surround him here. He has been very ill with violent spasms, and confined to his bed for a day or two, which one of the maids tells me is the reason why he has not been more strictly watched. They think he is too ill to get away. But he is greatly better to-day, and, though I have persuaded him to remain in bed, I think he has quite lost the complaint, and will be able to get off if you will do what I desire of you. I know not another being that I could trust. My poor father has spent a great deal of money, and been very liberal to many, but I

do not know one whom I do not suspect would be more ready to betray than to help him, if they saw him endeavouring to get away. His physician, Dr. Crockley, a man on whom he has heaped innumerable favours, is, I strongly suspect, acting as a spy upon him; and it is because I expect his daily visit presently that I will not let my father get up. Therefore you see, Michael, there are some difficulties to be encountered. Do you think you could manage to get a chaise to the gates without its being known that it was for him?"

"I am quite sure of it," replied Michael; "for to save time I came hither in a chaise myself, which is now waiting at the public-house to take me back to Fairly. I have only to go and tell the boy that I shall not be ready to return before night, in order to have him ready to start at any hour you please."

"To Fairly?" said Martha, musingly. "But it is no matter—he may sleep at the inn there as well as at any other; and the next morning we must make our way to the nearest port where there is a chance of our finding a steam-boat going to France. It will not do at present for my father to remain in the country. When he has got his certificate, he will be safe; but I greatly fear some difficulty about it."

While Martha was thus explaining her hopes and fears, the sound of carriage-wheels were heard slowly approaching by the road which led to the chief entrance, and which passed at no great distance from the window at which they were sitting.

"Here comes Dr. Crockley!" she exclaimed; "I am very glad his visit will be over so early. This will give me time for preparation."

But she was mistaken: the equipage she heard approaching was not the recently set-up cab of Dr. Crockley, but the donkey-chair of the ever-active Mrs. Gabberly. Nothing could be much farther from poor Martha's inclination than encountering the prying old woman at this moment; but having hastily told Michael to appear as if he were employed in taking a catalogue of the furniture, for which purpose paper, pens, and ink lay conveniently ready on one of the marble slabs, she hurried out into the hall for the purpose of meeting the physician, and attending him as usual to her father—so that the avoiding Mrs. Gabberly was impossible.

"Oh, my poor dear Martha! that's you, is it? Well now! you was just the person I wanted to see. But I do wonder you did not get off with your father, poor man! when he made his escape this morning."

"I know not what you mean, Mrs. Gabberly," replied Martha, gravely. "My poor father has been extremely ill, and is at this moment confined to his bed."

The old lady gave a wink with one of her little cunning black eyes, and nodding her head very expressively, replied, "Old birds are not caught with chaff, my dear."

"What is it that you mean, Mrs. Gabberly —that you do not believe me?" said Martha, indignantly.

"You are very foolish to bawl out in that manner, my dear, with that young fellow that's cataloguing in there close within hearing. Mind, it is your fault and not mine, if he suspects anything from your violence."

"You are taking an account of all the looking-glasses, are you not?" said Martha, approaching the drawing-room door, and addressing Michael. "You may come into Sir Matthew's room now, if you please. He was asleep when I sent you away just now." Then, turning to Mrs. Gabberly, she added—"Perhaps you would be so good as to see my poor father, Mrs. Gabberly? I would not wish you to stay long with him, for he is very feverish; but I dare say he would take it very kindly if you will just come in to inquire for him."

Looking a good deal surprised, but accepting the invitation with great alacrity, Mrs. Gabberly began to mount the stairs, exceedingly well pleased to have an opportunity of procuring so excellent a ticket of admission to every house in the neighbourhood as this ocular demonstration of the actual condition of the fallen knight would furnish. Michael, in compliance with the order he had received, followed after, and in a few minutes found himself once more in the presence of the man under whose tyranny he had suffered so terribly. But a harder heart than Michael's might have been softened into forgiveness and forgetfulness of all former injuries by the miserable aspect of the wretched man who lay stretched upon the splendid bed that he could no longer call his own. His steadfast-minded and affectionate daughter—the only earthly good that avenging Heaven had left him —entered first, intending to announce the visit of Mrs. Gabberly; but Sir Matthew started up in bed, and before she could speak, cried out, "Do not let that devil, Crockley, come to me, Martha! I will not see him, I tell you. I have got no pain now; and if I had, don't I know he would rather give me poison than physic? He is going to lose his annuity, you know."

"It is Mrs. Gabberly, dear papa, just come

to ask you how you are," said Martha, leading the old lady to the bedside. "She will not stay, because you are not well enough to talk; but you will be glad to see her, will you not?"

"Glad?" said the miserable man, knitting his brows, and throwing upon her a look of deep aversion. "Don't I know her? Is she not the town-crier of all the country round? Have I not paid her for it a hundred times? And do you think I don't know what she is come for now? Somebody else will pay her now, for bringing them word how the poor bankrupt Dowling looks."

"Well, now, that *is* terrible, to be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Gabberly. "He is quite shook in his mind. Do you think he would be outrageous if I was to feel his pulse, my dear? I should like to prescribe for him—I should indeed. Poor dear man! His talking about paying me *is* comical, to be sure. Let me feel your pulse, Sir Matthew—shall I?"

Sir Matthew looked so very much as if he would have liked to take her up in his enormous hand and throw her to the further end of the room, that Martha thought it prudent to prevent her nearer approach.

"You have now *seen* my father, Mrs. Gabberly," she said with emphasis, "and that, I

think, is all that can be necessary for your satisfaction."

"Oh! certainly—it is very satisfactory," she replied, but without appearing to have the slightest intention of leaving the room; for, in truth it was at that moment the place where, beyond all others, she best liked to be. The downfall of Sir Matthew Dowling was the subject that employed every tongue, and nobody could be so welcome to every drawing-room, and every dining-room too, throughout the neighbourhood, as one who could testify to having seen him, listened to him, and ascertained how he seemed to bear it. It was impossible that any person could have been better qualified for the service than Mrs. Gabberly. Willingly would the still brisk little lady have crept under the toilet-table, or the bed itself, rather than have lost so glorious an opportunity, and instead of attending to Martha's repeated assurance that she had better go now, she began opening sundry physic vials that stood on a table at the bottom of the bed, smelling some, tasting others, and pronouncing judgment upon all.

"It is quite a mystery to me, my dear, what Dr. Crockley can be thinking of, giving such medicines as these to your father," said she. "I see, plainly enough, that he is in a very inflam-

mable and irritable state, and he ought to be put altogether upon the depleting plan." Then putting her finger on her lip, a sign of secrecy, she whispered, "I'll just stay here, Martha, behind the bed-curtains, till Dr. Crockley comes, and I think it may be very useful for us to have a little conversation together. I know my poor dear father's method in these cases as well as he did himself, and he was regular-bred you know, which is more than we can say of poor dear Dr. Crockley."

Exceedingly provoked, Martha now addressed her father, saying, "Mrs. Gabberly wishes to stay, papa, till Dr. Crockley comes, in order that they may have a consultation about you; but you won't like that, shall you?"

"Like it?" replied the prostrate man, with bitterness, "Oh, dear, yes, I shall like it vastly! They are exactly a fitting pair to come together, glowering and gloating round the bed of a ruined neighbour. Let her stay, by all means, Martha, let her stay and watch it all. See, Mrs. Gabberly, there is a young auctioneering gentleman come to take an account of the furniture. Isn't it pleasant? I am sure it must do your heart good to see it. Don't go away, young man!" he continued, addressing Michael, who, shocked and disgusted, was making his way towards the

door. "Don't go away. Go on, never mind losing a little time, I dare say you will be paid for it all the same, and my dear good neighbour would not enjoy it half so much if she did not see something of the kind going on."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! quite wild and wandering! Isn't he? Calling Crockley and me a pair too! As if we ever thought of such a thing! I am sure, for one, I can answer for it that I never did! His doll of a wife, you know, hasn't been dead above a year, and I've no notion of such quick work: it is quite indecent, I think. Good gracious me, no;" she continued, catching Sir Matthew's fierce eye fixed upon her with a mixture of hatred and bitter irony; "what have I said—I'll bet a guinea he fancies I mean something about his marrying himself up, all in such a hurry, with Lady Clarissa."

"Lady Clarissa!" cried the knight in a loud voice. "That's right! I had very nearly forgotten her ladyship. Go to her this moment, Martha—tell her to come here. Is she not my wife? Bone of my bone—flesh of my flesh? Is she not, Mrs. Gabberly? And shall she not come hither and share with me the delight of seeing a broker taking possession of my furniture, and a dear good soul like you looking on? Go, Martha, go when I tell

you, and bring the right honourable Lady Clarissa Dowling here."

"I am quite certain she won't come, papa," said Martha, leaning down, and whispering in his ear. "So don't make me go to her."

"But she *shall*, though!" shouted Sir Matthew, "even if I go down and fetch her myself. My dear Mrs. Gabberly, my sweet Mrs. Gabberly—will you have the great condescension to go for her? You used to run about, if I did but hold up my finger, you know—and you would not be so ungenerous as to refuse now, merely because I am a bankrupt! Go to my Lady Clarissa, if you please, sweet Mrs. Gabberly, and tell her that, as she is a daughter of the noble house of Highlandloch, I wish, before we part, to give her a parting token of remembrance. She knows that I wear a magnificent diamond ring, Mrs. Gabberly, and you may just hint to her, if you please, that nothing has been taken off my body yet. I do assure you it will be a very pretty touching scene for you to witness and talk about. It will indeed. I am quite determined to have a sentimental parting; and as she has told me that she means to set off to-morrow, this will be just the right time for it—won't it, Mrs. Gabberly?"

Perfectly well disposed to execute the com-

mission, and quite as desirous as Sir Matthew could be that the proud poor lady, who had ever treated her with haughty coldness, should be properly humbled, she darted towards the door, in order to perform her errand; but Martha, remembering the manner in which she had left her step-mother engaged, stepped forward to prevent her, quietly saying, "If my father wishes to see his wife, Mrs. Gabberly, I can go for her, without troubling you—and I really wish you would permit me to lead you down stairs to your donkey-chair, at the same time; I am sure you must be aware that papa is not in a state to bear seeing company."

"You are quite right, my dear, quite right, indeed—Sir Matthew is looking sadly wild and feverish, and I should say that nobody whatever but the doctor and his own family ought to see him. Of course, I suppose, it would not be very convenient to hire attendants now, for these sort of people, I am sorry to say, always insist upon ready money, which is a cruel thing under such circumstances. But so it is, and therefore it follows that you and Lady Clarissa must be the chief nurses."

"Certainly, ma'am, it will be his own family who will wish to attend on him. And therefore,

if you please, I will take you down stairs, and see you to your carriage."

Me? my dear!" cried Mrs. Gabberly, in the shrillest possible tone. "Surely you cannot mean to call such an old friend as I am company? No, no, my dear Martha. Don't think me such a brute! I would not leave you just yet, for the whole world! You shall go yourself, my dear, if you will, and bring her ladyship up. I will stay here as quiet as a mouse, and watch by your poor papa. But perhaps it might be as well to desire that young man to finish with his scribbling, and get out of the room. He must have gone over every thing by this time, musn't he?"

"I will have her right honourable ladyship here before that fellow stirs a step, Martha. Do you hear me? That's more than half the fun," cried Sir Matthew, bursting into a shout of laughter. "Doesn't she know our kind, clever, observing, neighbour, who is come here so thoughtfully, just to look about her a little—doesn't she know her, almost as well as I do? And won't she enjoy thinking what a pleasant description dear Mrs. Gabberly will be able to give of my Lord Highlandloch's sweet daughter watching the broker, and seeing that he sets every thing down fair?"

Thankful was Martha that the supposed broker was one who could not in reality add to the horror of the scene. She turned to him as she left the room, saying, "You had better remain here, if you please, till I return:" upon which he modestly ensconced himself in a distant corner of the room, and resting his paper upon a commode, continued, as he stood, to scribble upon it.

Quite certain that it would be impossible to get rid of Mrs. Gabberly till her father's summons to his proud wife had been obeyed, and greatly more anxious to clear his room of this troublesome guest, than to spare the feelings of her ladyship, Martha entered the little sitting-room, determined to deliver the message concerning the diamond-ring, if she could not prevail without it. She found Lady Clarissa in the act of finishing the packing of her basket, by laying on the top of it sundry light articles of female attire, very cleverly calculated to make the whole pass under the general description of wearing apparel, which the courtesy of the law permits to be removed by all persons in the unfortunate situation of her ladyship.

"Now I hope you will cease your impertinent preaching, Miss Martha," she said, as the pale and agitated young woman entered the room. "Unless every separate night-cap and frill are to

be examined one by one by these brutes, I conceive no objection can be made to this package. Gather up the cotton wool, and poke it somewhere out of sight directly."

Martha obediently set herself to collect the scattered fragments of the suspicious-looking wool, but as she did so said, "My father wishes to see you, Lady Clarissa."

"Insolent wretch!" exclaimed her ladyship, pausing in the act of collecting various little articles for which she had not found room in the basket, "have you the audacity to bring me this as a message?"

"My father says, Lady Clarissa, that as you are going to leave him to-morrow, he should wish to see you once more," replied Martha.

"Monster!" screamed Lady Clarissa stamping her foot upon the floor, "he see me again? He dare to lift his bankrupt eyes upon the noble woman he has so basely injured?—Tell him, you bold messenger, who fear not to face the descendant of a dozen earls to convey to her the words of a bankrupt cotton-spinner, tell him that the only atonement he can make is TO DIE. Tell him this from me!—and may the ostentatious settlement his unprincipled pride made on me excuse me in some degree in the eyes of my noble brother for the degradation I brought upon him by accepting it!" These last words were

uttered with clasped hands, raised eyes, fervent accents, and all other ordinary indications of uttering a prayer.

Indignant and disgusted, Martha felt no scruple in employing the means her father had given her for obtaining the interview he desired, and quietly said, in reply to this burst, "My father stated that his motive for asking to see you, Lady Clarissa, proceeded from his wish to present to you, as a parting gift, the diamond ring which he wears on his right-hand."

The effect of these words was as sudden as that produced by the magic touch of a hand employed in turning off gas.

"That, indeed, is a most natural wish! Unhappy, guilty man! I can well believe that had he the crown jewels at command, he would deem them all too poor an offering to atone for the offence he has committed against me! I thank God, Martha Dowling, that my noble blood has never taught me to forget that I am a Christian! There are many women—believe me there are—of less exalted rank than myself, who would not deign to obey such a summons. But I feel what my duties are, and I shall nerve my courage to perform them. Come with me to my dressing-room, Martha; carry that basket for me, and then I will go with you to the bedside of Sir Matthew."

Martha attempted to obey, but the basket was too heavy for her to carry, and she set it down again, declaring that the task was beyond her strength.

"A tolerably good joke that," said Lady Clarissa, endeavouring to laugh, "considering your origin; but this is the last day of such pleasant jestings, and therefore I must bear it with good humour, I suppose." Then applying her own much stronger hand, she lifted her treasure, and was stalking off with it; but stopped short ere she reached the door, saying, "No, I will stay here while you go and fetch my faithful Mistress Saunderson. She enters into all my feelings, thank God! and is as strong as a Highland pony into the bargain." Having obediently performed this commission, and brought back the faithful Scotch waiting-woman, who had adhered very steadfastly to her mistress through all the vicissitudes of her fortune, Martha at length succeeded in marshalling the Lady Clarissa Dowling into the bedroom of her husband.

No signet-ring ever made a deeper impression on wax than the diamond one of Sir Matthew had done on the memory of his noble wife; and her first glance, as she entered the room, was directed to the hand which lay on the bedclothes, that she might see if it had been already re-

moved; but no, there it sparkled still, and with a gentler aspect than she had been seen to wear since the tremendous hour when the declension of Sir Matthew, from the richest commoner in the county into a bankrupt, had been announced to her, she said,

"You wish to see me, Sir Matthew—Martha says you wish to see me."

"Yes, my beloved!" replied the knight, "I do wish to see you. Angelic sweetness! How can I do otherwise? Look at yourself in the mirror, most beautiful Clarissa! Look in the mirror, before that broker there carries it off, and tell me if you think it possible that any man could bear to part with so much beauty, without having one final gaze upon it? And see, my dear, here is your amiable neighbour, Mrs. Gabberly! Is it not kind of her to leave all other visitings, that she may come to nestle herself here—among the very brokers, in the very centre of our misery? It is so heavenly-minded of her, isn't it? I guessed, indeed, that one great reason for her making such a tremendous sacrifice was the hope of edification from beholding the Christian spirit with which your ladyship bears your ladyship's overthrow; and, besides her own improvement from it, she wishes to have it in her power to describe it to the whole neighbourhood.

Begone! you vulgar gossip-picker!

Very right of her—isn't it, my dear? And that is the reason why I sent for you."

In general, the nose of Lady Clarissa greatly outblushed her cheeks, which had more of the jonquil than the rose in them: but now, from the tip of her high forehead to that of her long chin, she became crimson; and but from the remarkable length of her throat, which seemed to rear itself in defiance of such danger, a fit of apoplexy might have been expected.

"Begone! you vulgar gossip-picker!" she cried, turning in uncontrollable rage upon the terrified, yet greatly amused little woman, "and tell the contemptible neighbourhood through which you are going to crawl in your donkey-cart, like a snail in his shell, leaving your slime as you go, tell them all, from me, that the best consolation under my remorse at having forgotten my own dignity, by condescending to hold a place among them, arises from being released from the degradation of associating with so contemptible a being as yourself, and all who are capable of listening to you!" And having uttered these words in a piercing voice, she rushed to the door, threw it with great violence wide open, and so left it, as she paced, with rapid but tragic strides, to the shelter of her own boudoir, and the sympathy of Mistress Saunderson.

It was, perhaps, because the door was open, and that he knew the sound would follow her, that Sir Matthew burst into the most violent shout of laughter that ever made itself heard from mortal lungs : it terrified Martha, made Michael Armstrong shudder, and caused Mrs. Gabberly herself to wish she were anywhere else, notwithstanding the very valuable information this extraordinary scene would enable her to communicate. Long did this frightful laugh continue, and when strength seemed to fail, and the boisterous merriment could be sustained no longer, a vehement and reiterated hissing followed, which at length ended in such complete exhaustion, that Sir Matthew fell back, pale and apparently motionless, upon his pillow.

" Mrs. Gabberly," said Martha, " I must beg you to leave us now. You must perceive that my poor father ought to be alone. It is very important—fearfully important, I am afraid—that he should be kept perfectly quiet! Give me leave to wish you good morning."

" I must say that it does seem very odd in you, Miss Martha, to persist in calling me *company*. Good gracious! To think of the terms on which I have always been in this house before your poor papa's unfortunate marriage! I cannot and I will not leave you in such a condition.

It would be perfectly monstrous, and everybody would call me a brute for it. Till Dr. Crockley has been here, I really neither can nor will go. I am quite determined that I will hear what he says about him."

"Let her stay," said Sir Matthew, in a hollow whisper, which proved that he was neither asleep nor dead, though his closed eyes and ghastly countenance might have been mistaken for one state or the other.

Martha went to him, took his hand, wiped the profuse perspiration from his brow, and then placing herself in a chair beside him, continued to watch his altered countenance, alike unmindful, as it seemed, of the presence of Mrs. Gabberly, or that of Michael either.

The lady, perfectly contented to be thus quietly established as a looker-on, determined, for the present, neither to move nor speak, lest she might lose the valued privilege thereby; but Michael became so conscious of the awkwardness of his situation, and so fearful lest Martha, from forgetting him, might get into a scrape likewise, that he ventured to approach the foot of the bed on tiptoe, merely for the purpose of recalling himself to her recollection, and then, on seeing her start at the sight of him, he said

in a whisper, "I suppose I had better go down stairs now, Miss Martha?"

Martha, in reply to this, nodded affirmatively, and in the same low tone added, "I shall have other business to speak to you about. Do not go away till you have seen me."

Michael's eyes were naturally turned to Martha while this passed; but when he withdrew them, and was about to make his retreat, he caught the large, wide-open, wild-looking eyes of Sir Matthew fixed earnestly upon him. The young man involuntarily dropped his eye-lids, for the gaze was a frightful one, and turned to leave the room.

"Stay!" roared a hoarse but loud and stunning voice from the bed. "Stay, devil! demon! hell-bird! what do you come here for? Cowardly blackguard! Do you think I do not know you? You never dared to come till it was too late for me to hold you! I have heard of your purring round the place weeks ago. But you escaped me then, base runaway! What do you come spying here for? Did you think I should not know ye? Did you think I should forget those d—d hypocritical eyes, and that hateful curly hair, of the devil's own colour? No, my pretty 'prentice, I have not forgotten

your crocodile looks, and never shall. I suppose you thought you should bring me to repentance by sending home word that you were dead. Was that it, eh?"

"I am able now, Sir Matthew, to pay for leaving the mill before my time, and I am quite ready to do it, if you please," replied Michael, gently. But he spoke to one who heard him not. Sir Matthew had a neck as short and thick as that of his lady was long and thin. His last interview with her had not been a salutary one for a man in his state of mind and body; and the subsequent discovery of Michael, of whose visit to the factory he had heard from Parsons, and at whose escape he expressed the most unbridled rage, accelerated symptoms which had before threatened him, and sent such a rush of blood to the brain as instantly produced apoplexy, and left him totally deprived of sense and motion.

Martha, whose eyes were fixed upon him, uttered a fearful shriek, and threw herself on the body, believing that he was dead. But Mrs. Gabberly knew better. She had practised too long as an amateur not to know a fit of apoplexy when she saw it, and promptly exclaimed, "Get away, Martha! Get off of him, child! He is not dead, I tell you; and, if we could but bleed him, he would open his eyes again fast enough."

With the rapidity of lightning poor Martha obeyed. She withdrew herself from the bed, endeavoured to raise her father in her arms, and, by the help of Michael, succeeded. She then bared his arm, bound her own waist-belt tightly round it, and with unshrinking courage thrust a sharp penknife which she drew from her pocket into a vein, before the skilful lady who had prescribed the measure had half recovered her astonishment on perceiving that the poor girl had conceived the project of putting it into immediate execution.

The old adage, that "where there is a will there is a way," was never better illustrated than by this act of the tender-hearted and invalided Martha. She felt that her father's life hung on the promptness with which the operation was performed; she felt, too, that if she shrunk from it, there was no one else who would perform it; and, totally forgetful of herself and her own feelings, conquered the rebellious weakness that would have held her hand, and did what, two minutes before, she would have believed it utterly impossible she could have done. The result did honour to the skill of Mrs. Gabberly. The lazy current flowed, though reluctantly. Sir Matthew opened his large eyes, rolled them from side to side, heaved a deep and heavy sigh, and pre-

sently attempted to speak, but this was beyond his power.

"What more should be done?" said the pale and now trembling Martha, turning towards Mrs. Gabberly.

"Why now, my dear, you must just let him alone for a little bit,". replied the physician by hereditary right. "Well now," she added, "wasn't it a blessing that I was here? If I had not stayed, he would have been as dead as mutton by this time."

CHAPTER IX.

A friendly consultation—A dangerous embassy—Lady Clarissa receives some disagreeable intelligence—An awkward contest—Unpleasant visions—A fitting termination to the confidential union between master and man.

SUCH was the state of affairs in the bedroom of Sir Matthew Dowling when Dr. Crockley entered it. Were all the words which Mrs. Gabberly then uttered in explanation of what she had done, why she had done it, and how her doings had answered, to be written down here, my waning pages would hardly suffice to contain them. Dr. Crockley nodded, winked, approved, and applauded a great deal, joked a little, and finally felt the patient's pulse, observing, at the same time, that it was necessary at any rate to bring him round sufficiently to get a little talk on business out of him before he popped off for good and all.

"Very right and proper if you can manage it, doctor," sagaciously observed Mrs. Gabberly. "But you may depend upon it that—" and here

she whispered something, that it was especially intended Martha should be neither the better nor the worse for. The doctor nodded and winked, and nodded again; and then turning to the poor girl, who was not only the one who alone in that presence cared anything for the prostrate millocrat, but the one of all created beings who would alone have felt his death to be a cause of mourning,—Dr. Crockley turned to her, and with very little of even the external decency of sympathy said, "Do you think you can manage to get some mustard, my dear, out of the clutches of the bailiffs?—because that is what we want here."

Without answering, Martha moved towards the door; and Michael, not conceiving that the physician's words were but a brutal jest, and fancying that Martha might really have to petition those who now held authority in the household for the article wanted, stepped after her, to request that he might execute the commission in her place.

"You shall come down with me, Michael," she replied, "and I doubt not you will be able to procure what we want without difficulty. But alas! Michael, it will avail nothing—I am sure by their whispering that they both know it will avail nothing. Nevertheless it shall be tried.

But is it not dreadful that, of all his numerous family, there should be only one to receive his dying breath? O God!" she added, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, "if it be a judgment, let it atone for all that has been wrong! For surely it is a heavy one!"

On reaching the hall, the pitying Michael, who in the sufferings of his friend forgot all the cruelty of his enemy, insisted upon going alone into the thronged and noisy offices, while she sat down to wait for his return. He did his errand promptly, and was by her side again in a minute or two; but he found that she had left the chair on which he had placed her, and was now pacing up and down the hall in violent agitation.

"I am overpowered, I am borne down by all this horror—this deep and bitter grief!" she exclaimed. "And there is not a single human being near me but your ill-used self, Michael, from whom I am likely to find any real kindness. The conduct of all with whom I have had intercourse since my poor father's distresses came upon him has been such as to make me wish rather to shun than seek them at this awful moment, yet I want some one to tell me how I ought to act. I know that fearful man, Parsons, who is greatly in his confidence, had business of

importance to settle with him; for again and again my father has said to me, since the execution has been in the house, that, let what would happen, he must find time to speak to him. Ought I not then to send to him in this extremity?"

"Would to heaven I were fitter to advise you, my dear Miss Martha," replied Michael, with equal respect and tenderness. "Certainly, if such were your father's words, it is very right to remember them. Shall I go to the factory, and summon Mr. Parsons hither?"

"Oh! it is hateful to me," replied poor Martha, "to call such a being to his deathbed! But it may be that the interests of others are at stake, and when I recall my father's earnestness as he spoke of the necessity of seeing him, I tremble at the idea of disobeying him. Go then, Michael, hasten to the factory, and tell this man that his master is very ill, but that if he recovers his senses and his speech it is probable he may wish to speak to him."

Michael lost no time in obeying her; and on reaching the mills found the superintendent, as usual, at his post. At the first glance he did not recognise the messenger, for the appearance of the young man was greatly changed by the style of equipment which, under the advice of

Mr. Bell, had been provided for him. No sooner did Michael speak, however, than the man started as if he had been shot.

"Sir Matthew send *you?*" he exclaimed. "What mountebank tricks are you got at now, you young villain? What! did you think that this fine toggery could bamboozle me? Has it really bamboozled him? Have you, faith and truth, contrived to pass yourself off upon your dearly-beloved benefactor as a gentleman of fashion and fortune, who was come to make him a visit of condolence upon his misfortunes? A capital fellow, ain't you? or, perhaps, my nice young grandee, you fancy his grinders are drawn, and that he can't, or won't maybe, have anything to do, now that he has fallen into trouble, with putting such an elegant young gentleman to inconvenience? Is that it? But it is just possible that other people may be more at leisure. Who knows?"

"Never mind me now, Mr. Parsons," replied Michael, utterly indifferent, at that moment, to any thing and every thing that his old enemy might attempt for the purpose of annoying him. "Never think of me or my affairs, at such a time as this. You have given me no opportunity to speak, or you would have understood that it was not Sir Matthew who sent me here, but his daughter. Sir Matthew was too ill, when I

left the house, to know anything about it; but Miss Martha thinks that, if he recovers his speech and senses, he may wish to speak to you."

"Like enough!" replied the superintendent with a sneer. "Sir Matthew's troubles have nowise changed his nature. The young lady is quite right: but I shouldn't have thought as he'd have told her any thing about it, either. Not but what she might approve the job, too, if she had got any spirit in her. But she is but a poor, puling sort of a cretur, much as she was when she used to cosset you, my beautiful master runaway apprentice. However, never mind that now, as you say, my pretty master: there's a time for all things. You may just step in here while I change my coat. It bean't the first time as you have entered this pleasant building, Master Mike, is it?"

Michael was going to obey him; but, at the moment he was about to pass the threshold, something in the eye of the superintendent made him pause. He recollected full well the ready lock of that once hated door; and it struck him as by no means impossible that his old acquaintance might turn it upon him, if he put it in his power to do so.

Fears for his own personal safety he certainly had none, being quite aware that he was no

longer in danger of being kidnapped as heretofore; but the idea of Martha being left, at this her utmost need, in want of any little service he could afford was quite enough to make him cautious; and with something of an involuntary smile, he stepped back, saying, "There is no occasion for me to wait for you, Mr. Parsons: I have delivered my message, and you may obey it or not, as you please. At any rate, you cannot want me to show you the way to Dowling Lodge." And so saying, he turned round, and walked out of the yard.

"Pestilent young viper!" muttered the superintendent between his closed teeth. "That I should live to see him strut off before me in that fashion! But I'll have a try if I can't plague him yet. Fool that I was, when I had him snug by myself on Ridgetop Moor, not to give him one farewell thrashing with the horsewhip! If I had put out a joint or two, it would have been no great matter; and then I should have been spared the d—d sight of him now, marching off—hang him! like a peacock before me! As to changing my coat, that's fudge. People don't trouble themselves to change their coats, when they are going to pay their compliments to an apoplectic bankrupt."

Having fairly got beyond all the bolts and

bars immediately within the jurisdiction of Mr. Parsons, Michael slackened his pace, being rather inclined to have the society of his former tyrant than not. "Sir Matthew appears to be in a very dangerous state, Mr. Parsons," said he, as soon as the sulky superintendent came up to him.

"Perhaps your right honourable greatness has been studying medicine since I had the pleasure of taking that little drive with you into Derbyshire?"

"I have studied many things since that time, Mr. Parsons," replied Michael, laughing; "and one is the nature and use of locks."

The tone in which this was answered was so brutal, that the young man, rather from disgust than anger, walked on faster than his foe could follow him; and, reaching the house some minutes before him, made his way again without ceremony—for it was no time for it—into the apartment of Sir Matthew. A considerable change had taken place in the condition of the patient since he left it. The cataplasms had so far succeeded as to restore animation and consciousness: Sir Matthew, still surrounded by Martha, Mrs. Gabberly, and the doctor, was gazing upon them with widely-opened eyes, which, though wild and wandering in expression, were evi-

dently not devoid of speculation. Michael had entered very gently, but not without being heard by the sick man; for he turned his eyes full upon him as he approached. The sight of him, however, no longer seemed to produce any emotion; for, after looking quietly at him for a moment, Sir Matthew turned his gaze upon Mrs. Gabberly, who, from being in the act of leaning over him, brought herself particularly within his sight.

"Is Parsons come?" said Martha in a whisper.

"He must be in the hall by this time," replied Michael: "shall I tell him to come up?"

"My dear father has not yet spoken," she said, "but perhaps he may understand me.—Parsons is here, papa," she added, taking her father's hand, and leaning over him—"should you like to see him?"

"He is in London, my dear," replied the knight very distinctly.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Martha, tenderly kissing him—"Thank God! His speech is not in the least affected!"

"Rather wandering, though," said Dr. Crockley, winking his eye at Mrs. Gabberly.

"I should say, bleed him again, if you want to get anything out of him," observed Mrs. Gabberly, looking sagaciously at the doctor.

"Perhaps I may, in an hour or two," he replied, applying his finger to the patient's pulse.

Sir Matthew fixed his eyes upon him, and laughed a horrid, rattling, ghastly sort of laugh, that seemed to come from his throat. "You haven't quite done with me yet, have you, Crockley?" said he.

"Done with you, my dear friend? God forbid!" replied the physician, rather startled at the apparently healthy state of his patient's intellect, and affectionately smoothing his pillows and settling the bedclothes about him.

"Would you like to see Parsons, dear papa?" said Martha, gently, and again bending over him.

"Oh, yes!" he replied eagerly; "I'll see Parsons now, directly—I thould be very sorry not to see Parsons. I may live, or I may die, you know; but I must see Parsons."

Martha immediately left the room, intending to explain to the superintendent, before she brought him into it, the state in which her father lay, and the necessity of receiving any orders he might wish to give with as little disturbance to him as possible. On reaching the hall, however, she saw him not, and was on the point of returning upstairs to inquire of Michael where he had left him, when she caught the sound

of his voice from Sir Matthew's study. On entering this room she perceived, not only Mr. Parsons, but Lady Clarissa, who, standing before the commode in which, as she happened to know, her husband was accustomed to keep papers of importance, as well as money, appeared to have been very assiduously examining its contents: for every recess had evidently been visited, and, as one of her hands was tightly clutched over a pocket-book, it seemed that her researches had not been wholly in vain, and that she had not privately obtained possession of his keys for nothing.

"I was sent for, my lady," said Parsons, apparently replying to some question of her ladyship's, which, to judge by her angry frown and the vexed expression of her countenance, had not been a civil one.

"My father wishes to see Mr. Parsons directly," said Martha.

"And, by your ladyship's leave, I must take that green pocket-book with me," said Parsons.

"What pocket-book, you rude fellow?" replied Lady Clarissa, indignantly.

"That one as your ladyship now holds in your left hand," replied the confidential superintendent.

"I wonder, sirrah, that you do not ask me

to give you the rings off my fingers!" cried the angry mistress of the mansion. "Go to your master, fellow, if he has sent for you, and I shall go too. So you need not trouble yourself about the pocket-book."

And with these words she pushed past both Martha and Mr. Parsons, preceding them to the sick man's chamber. By the time they entered it his eyes were again closed, but he appeared to breathe without difficulty, though rather more audibly than usual, and Martha fancied that he was asleep.

"Hush!" said she. "Do not disturb him. He is sleeping."

Dr. Crockley and Mrs. Gabberly had withdrawn to a window, and were evidently in consultation; but whether on the symptoms of apoplexy or bankruptcy might be doubtful. Michael, however, was standing close beside the bed, and, in answer to Martha's observation, shook his head, saying, "No! not asleep."

"Then he'll manage to hear what I've got to say to him," said Parsons, advancing, and throwing a glance of spiteful vengeance at Lady Clarissa, "because it is just what he wants to know."

At the sound of Parsons's voice Sir Matthew opened his eyes, and made an effort to raise

himself; but this was beyond his power, and it was only by being lifted with as little effort as possible on his own part, as if he were already dead, that he was placed in the attitude he seemed to desire, and in which he was supported by pillows, and by the arms of poor Martha, who had placed herself on the bolster behind him. It was a frightful and awful expression which then took possession of his sunken features; nevertheless a hateful sort of smile made part of it.

"Parsons! that's you, isn't it? That's Parsons that stands there?" he said, directing his misty eyes full upon the superintendent.

"Yes, Sir Matthew, 'tis me," replied the man.

"Have you done my bidding, Parsons?" demanded the knight, with a sort of gasping which seemed to threaten that his breath was about to leave him.

"Yes, Sir Matthew, it's all regularly made out," replied Parsons; "nobody can mistake now about times or dates in any way."

"And isn't that the Honourable Lady Clarissa?" said the sick man, directing his eyes towards her.

"Yes, Sir Matthew," replied Parsons, with something like a titter.

"Then—then—then," panted the dying man, "let her ladyship know what was the last business that I gave you instructions about."

"A very fitting business for an honourable gentleman to attend to, when his affairs are in confusion, and he not in an over-good state of health," replied the confidential servant, turning himself round, so as exactly to face her ladyship. "No less a matter than restoring three good thousand pounds a-year, for ever, towards clearing scores with his creditors."

Now, three thousand pounds a-year was exactly the sum for the settlement of which upon herself a daughter of the noble house of Highlandloch had condescended to assume the name of Dowling, and the mention of the often-meditated sum roused her ladyship's attention so effectually that her face involuntarily protruded itself beyond her body, till her nose very nearly reached that of the individual who was addressing her.

"Go on!" said Sir Matthew, positively chuckling, though his chin dropped on his chest as he spoke.

"Well, then," resumed Parsons, leering aside at Dr. Crockley, who with Mrs. Gabberly had drawn near to listen to this very interesting disclosure,—"well, then, justice is justice; and Sir

Matthew, let him die when he will, won't have it upon his conscience that he defrauded his creditors to make a settlement upon any lady in the land, gentle or simple; because you see he has left proof, plain and clear, that he had committed more than one act of bankruptcy before he made the settlement upon her ladyship, and for that good and excellent reason her ladyship will have no right to one single penny that he leaves behind him; and that is a comfort to an honest man like me, who likes to see justice done to high and low."

"Villain!" screamed Lady Clarissa, "it is false!"

"No, no, no, no!" issued from the pillows, in a voice that shook with ghastly laughter. "True, all true; and now she may go to Scotland."

"Just ask her to give you your green pocket-book, Sir Matthew, before she goes," said Parsons, grinning. "I saw her ladyship take it out of your bureau, and, if she will be pleased to open her hand, I think it will tumble out of it."

With a look of inexpressible rage, Lady Clarissa turned away from him and made towards the door.

"Stop her, Crockley!" cried Sir Matthew,

feebly, adding, with panting difficulty, "and—you—shall—have—it."

Dr. Crockley had a great respect for the peerage, and would, beyond all question, have preferred snatching a pocket-book from nine hundred and ninety-nine untitled ladies in succession, rather than from one Lady Clarissa; but he felt that this was no moment for ceremony, and, obeying what was very likely to be the last behest of his patron, he rolled his fat person after her with extraordinary muscular exertion, and, grasping the lady's robe with one hand, seized on her rigidly clenched fist with the other, in such a sort, that, according to the prophecy of Mr. Parsons, the green pocket-book dropped out of it.

Unfortunately, however, the attitude in which this feat was performed was one which could not be retained by the ill-balanced person of the doctor, after the supporting form of the lady on whom he had thrown himself had escaped from his grasp, and, struggling with as much anxious care as Cæsar to fall well (*i. e.* upon the pocket-book), he measured his length upon the ground.

Parsons, though certainly not hoping for so lucky an accident, had, with the same sort of instinct which brings the crow beside a sickly

sheep, followed closely the retreating steps of her ladyship, and, adroitly jerking the coveted pocket-book with his foot, so that it should escape the being buried under the stumbling physician, prepared himself to dip and catch it. But the success of the manœuvre was less perfect than its ingenuity deserved; for, ere his tall rigid person had bent itself sufficiently for him to reach the ground, Mrs. Gabberly, who had become one of the group at the same instant with Dr. Crockley, was in possession of it, and, ere the prostrate Crockley or the stooping Parsons could raise their eyes, the prize had dropped into the deepest recesses of a prodigious pocket, which reached nearly to the bottom of her little petticoat.

It is probable that both inquiry and search would have been instituted in consequence of this, had not the condition of the patient at that moment rendered it impossible. Sir Matthew's ghastly eyes had fixed themselves on Lady Clarissa during the foregoing scene; but, as if, though they had still the power of discerning objects, they had lost that of moving after them, he appeared to lose sight of her as she approached the door, and the heavy orbs seemed seeking for something on which to rest themselves without any change of position. It

chanced that Michael, who, quite aware that the last moments of Sir Matthew were approaching, determined not to leave the premises till he had learned the wishes and intentions of Martha, was at that moment moving from the corner he had occupied near a window, not within sight of the bed, to a table exactly at the foot of it, on which was placed a *flaçon* of Cologne water, which poor Martha, almost exhausted by the painful attitude necessary to sustain the pillows, had made him a sign to get for her. This movement brought him within the range of Sir Matthew's eyes, and something in his aspect, as he cautiously bent to take the bottle, or else the thick-coming fancies of a brain diseased, though not paralyzed, suddenly produced a terrible effect upon the dying man, and he uttered a cry so harsh and terrible as to constrain the attention even of the preoccupied group at the door.

"There's a dead body walking about the room!" he ejaculated in an unnatural and frightful accent. "He is come for me! and I must go!" The shriek which followed these words was terrible. In a minute or two he spoke again, but almost in a whisper. "One? No! —it is not one, it is five hundred! Take them! —take them away from me, I tell you! They

are all dirty, beastly factory-children. Their arms and legs are all broken and smashed, and hanging by bits of skin. Take them away, I tell you, Crockley! Their horrid joints will drop upon me! They are dangling and loose, I tell you!" And then again he shouted with so fearful a cry, that even Parsons pressed his hands upon his ears to save them from the sound.

"Calm him! calm him!" cried the trembling Martha. "Can you not give him something that may still this dreadful agony, Doctor Crockley?"

"It is not a very easy symptom to master, Miss Martha," replied the physician drily. "However, it is not likely that it will last long. All the life that's left is just about the heart and brain, which is always unlucky if there happens to be anything particular upon the mind."

"Parsons!" cried the dying man, again raising his voice, but without looking towards the person he addressed—"Parsons! are you not ashamed of yourself to turn the whole set of them out upon me at once in this way? You that have payed, and bribed, and tipped so often! Rascal! Take them off me, I tell you! Do you mean that they shall stifle me?

They will stifle me!—they will, they will! I cannot breathe for them! Parsons!—I tell you they will stifle me!"

"Papa! my dear, dear papa!" cried Martha, bending forward till her cheek touched that of her father. "Compose yourself! It is only that you are unwell, and fancy things. There are no children here, papa, but your own Martha."

Her tender caresses, and her gentle voice together, seemed to reach and quiet for a moment his wandering intellect. He made an effort to turn his head towards her, but that was impossible; and Michael, who had upon his first frightful cry removed himself to the head of the bed, where the eye of the wretched man could not reach, silently offered to take Martha's place, that she might station herself where it could. She quickly understood him, and in a moment stood where that dying eye could gaze upon her. His hand, with its glittering ring, still lay upon the bed; she took it in her's, and fondly chafed and kissed it. But it was stiff and cold as marble!

"Father! dearest father!" she said, "speak one word to me!" But it was too late; his lips never opened more. For some hours longer

he continued to breathe, but, on again feeling his pulse, Dr. Crockley declared that its faint pulsations must inevitably cease before night.

"I suppose your old servant, Betty Parker, is still in the house, Miss Martha?" said he. The poor girl bowed an affirmative, but had no power to speak.

"Well, then," said the doctor, "I should recommend that you should put her to sit here: it is no good for any of us to stay any longer, for it's all over just as much as if he was already in his coffin. You had better go away, and see what you can pack up to get off with, Miss Martha; that's all that is left to be done, as far as I can see. Come, Mrs. Gabberly," he added, "I have got a friendly word or two to say to you: so your boy shall mount my pony, and I'll drive your donkey for you." And so saying, he took the little woman under his arm and trudged off without waiting for her to inform him whether she approved his proposal or not. Mr. Parsons, giving one scowling look at the silent bed, followed them, and Martha and Michael were left together beside the dying man.

Upon perceiving the totally unconscious state into which Sir Matthew had fallen, Michael had gently withdrawn himself from behind his pillows,

and now stood, almost as silent and motionless as himself, beside the bed, respectfully waiting to receive from the desolate and weeping Martha some hint or instruction respecting his staying where he was, or leaving her. Never, when the poor dependant of her family, had the young heart of Michael been impressed with a feeling of respect so profound as he at that moment felt for the unhappy girl. In truth, the feeling was so powerful as to interfere with his usefulness, for he shrank from appearing to put himself forward too presumptuously by giving her advice, or venturing in any degree to dictate what it might be best for her to do. But when, after remaining thus bashfully silent for a quarter of an hour, he perceived that she gave no other sign of life than by tears that flowed incessantly, and sighs that seemed to heave her breast almost to bursting, — when he saw this, he began to think that some degree of seeming presumption on his part might be better and more profitable for her, whom he would really have died to serve, than the continuance of a degree of deference which must render him useless. Approaching, therefore, to the chair on which she had thrown herself, he ventured to say, "Miss Martha! where can I find your old servant, Betty Parker? I remember her very well — she used to be

always in the nursery. If you would tell me where she is likely to be, I will go for her."

Poor Martha for a moment ceased to weep, and looked up at him. "Michael Armstrong!" she replied, "I am not conscious of ever having injured any human being but yourself; and yet you are the only one who is near to support and help me at this dreadful hour. God bless you for your kindness, my good boy! Do not go away, Michael—that is, I mean, do not leave the house till all is over—indeed, I think you may be useful to me!"

"Miss Martha," he returned, "will you trust me to sit here while you yourself summon whomever you may wish to keep you company. I will keep out of sight in case—" and here he stopped.

"His eyes will never open more, Michael!" she replied, while the tears again burst forth, "and, thank God! their last look at me was gentle. But I almost fear to leave the room, Michael—I would not that he should breathe his last, and I not by him." But Michael, unskilful as he was, felt that the scene was too awful a one for the poor girl to be left alone in; and he therefore persisted to declare, with the authority which such subduing sorrow gives to all around who will take the trouble to exercise

it, that he would watch by the bedside of her father while she sought the old woman mentioned by Dr. Crockley.

Reluctantly and unresistingly she consented, and, giving a look at the bed that seemed to wring her very heart, she quitted the room, leaving Michael Armstrong alone with the motionless mass of still living clay before which he had so often trembled.

How strangely eventful had been the interval between those well-remembered days and the one actually present with him ! How extraordinary the change in the circumstances of both parties ! It was not triumph, but it was thankfulness, which Michael felt, as the sense of this came fully upon him during these moments of profound stillness ; and the result of all the moving thoughts that crowded upon his mind was an earnest prayer to Heaven that he might never be placed in any circumstances likely to harden his heart, and make him the cause of suffering to others—a fearful and a dreadful crime, which he felt, as he gazed with trembling awe on the sunken features of the living corse before him, must in the sight of God be held as one of the most daring rebellion to his heavenly will of which man is capable.

Solemn and solitary as was Michael's posi-

tion in the chamber of Sir Matthew, the interval of Martha's absence did not seem long. She returned accompanied by the old servant who had been nursery attendant, though never raised to the dignity of nurse, from the birth of the eldest child of the family, and who was the only one remaining of all the numerous household who retained the slightest feeling of attachment to any of them. To her, habit stood in the place of preference, and she might perhaps be said to love all the Dowling children, from the eldest to the youngest,—a sentiment which led her to conceive, as in duty bound, a most hearty detestation of their step-mother. It was, therefore, with something very like pleasure that she obeyed a summons so solemn and so peremptory as to justify her, even in the judgment of Mrs. Saunderson, for laying aside the ironing-box, which she had been plying incessantly for two whole days upon the frills and furbelows of Lady Clarissa, in order to obey it. On perceiving the condition in which her master lay, Betty Parker strongly advised poor Martha to retire, urging the uselessness of her remaining to look upon what was so grievous, when a baby might see at half a glance that the poor gentleman could not tell friend from foe. But Betty Parker knew little of the intensity of Martha's pertinacious

love for her unworthy parent, if she fancied that her very reasonable remonstrance would produce any effect. Martha attempted not even to answer it, but, placing herself in a chair close beside the bed, remained nearly as motionless as the faintly breathing figure that lay upon it.

Poor Michael knew not too well what he ought to do next. He felt that he was useless there; he knew that he should be stared at, as a very incomprehensible intruder, if he descended to the offices. Yet he remembered that his benefactress had bid him not to go, and he could not have felt himself more strongly bound to remain had the crime of high treason been involved in his departure. Yet there was something in the stupid, puzzled look with which Betty Parker regarded him that vexed his spirit. He was conscious that he had no business in that room, and therefore at such a moment he ought not to be there. After a few moments of reflection he approached Martha, and, making so profound a reverence as to convince Betty that, let him be who he would, he was a very well-behaved young gentleman, he said, "I will now, Miss Martha, go to the inn for an hour or two, and then return to take your orders." A look of gratitude was all her reply, and Michael departed.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he entered the little inn where the postboy who had driven him from Fairly in the morning was still waiting his orders. "I cannot tell you yet, my lad, when I shall be ready to return," he replied, in answer to the boy's questionings.

"It's all one to me, master," said the driver. "In course I shall be paid accordingly."

"Certainly you will," returned Michael: and he was then left to eat his solitary dinner with what appetite he might.

For three long melancholy hours he employed himself in pacing backwards and forwards on the high-road before the little inn, and was beginning to think that time enough had elapsed to justify his returning to inquire how matters were going on at Dowling Lodge, when the sound of a carriage, approaching as it seemed from the park-gates, caused him to stop abruptly to listen, and to look.

The equipage that drew near was a handsome travelling carriage, though its appearance was considerably disfigured by the prodigious quantity of luggage which was fastened by ropes and chains to every part of it. The imperial only formed the foundation for a pyramid of trunks and bandboxes which were piled upon it. The servant's seat behind was loaded to its

very utmost capacity with more trunks and bandboxes, while chained below it was a massive coffer, that looked very like a plate-chest, having suspended round its sides bundles, baskets, and bags innumerable. Nor was the interior by any means reserved for live lumber alone, for, although the rigid figures of Lady Clarissa Dowling, and her waiting-woman, Saunderson, were visible in the midst, it appeared to be crammed with every imaginable species of property which such a conveyance could transport.

Michael watched the overloaded vehicle roll by with great satisfaction. "Whatever happens," thought he, "Miss Martha must be better without her." Relieved by knowing that he should not again run the risk of encountering her delectable ladyship, Michael immediately took his way to the magnificent mansion she had forsaken, and, perceiving that the hall-doors stood wide open, preferred passing through them to encountering again the motley throng that had taken possession of the offices. But, instead of finding this portion of the house as quiet and forsaken as he had left it, he was startled by hearing, as he mounted the steps of the stately portico, a multitude of voices in violent altercation.

At first he felt disposed to turn away and seek another entrance, but the vehemence of the sounds he heard excited his curiosity, and he went on. Instead of one, half-a-dozen strangers might have entered without running any risk of having their right there challenged, so great was the confusion that reigned; and Michael might have passed up the great stairs, and into the chamber which it was his purpose to visit, without any difficulty. But he was prevented from taking immediate advantage of this by hearing words which excited new fears for the unfortunate Martha; and, ere he had listened many minutes, he became aware that a new creditor had reached the Lodge after he left it, who had come, armed with proper authority, to arrest the knight, dead or alive. Nor did the discussion of this event cause all the uproar; for the agents of the parties who had previously sent in the execution were threatening with all sorts of punishment several of the servants, whom they accused of having been bribed to assist Lady Clarissa in the removal of many valuables which she had no right to take. It was not this part of the tumult, however, that interested him; and, having obtained but too clearly the information that Sir Matthew was arrested, he once more sought for the unhappy Martha in the dis-

mal chamber where he had left her. And there he found her; but with such frightful adjuncts to her natural grief, that the state of quiet decent sorrow in which he had left her seemed a condition positively enviable compared to that in which he found her now.

Sir Matthew had breathed his last, and the corpse was already arranged with decency upon its stately bed; but on each side of it stood an officer whose duty it was to violate by their presence the solemn sanctity of that dismal chamber, and to prevent the body's being carried to the grave till the claims of their employer were satisfied. In front of her father's corpse—with her troubled eyes (no longer bathed in the healing dew of natural sorrow) turning from it to its rude guardians, and back again to all that was left of the sinful being she had so fondly, blindly loved—stood the wretched daughter, so sad a spectacle of woe, that it was evident the men themselves turned their hard eyes studiously away, because they felt a pang of pity as they looked upon her.

"Come with me, Miss Martha!" cried Michael, unceremoniously seizing her arm. "You must not, you cannot remain here. You can do no good, Miss Martha; all is over now! You must come away—you must indeed." The only

answer that poor Martha gave was forcibly shaking off the hand that held her, and then pointing, first to her father's body, and afterwards to the unseemly attendants who stood beside it.

"It is no use, young man, to strive with her," said Betty, who was still occupied in completing some of her lugubrious operations about the bed: "I know her better than you do. She will stay here watching him till she is as dead as he is, rather than go away and leave his body to be tended by such as those."

For a moment Michael really felt all the enervating effects of despair, and stood perfectly incapable of even imagining any means of help for the agony which it wrung his heart to witness. But, as the old woman pursued her ghastly occupation, she went muttering on, expatiating on the sinful and unchristian outrage that was thus committed. "And what will the rogue get by it?" she said. "Does he mean to show the corpse for a farthing a-head to his factory blackguards? Isn't he as big a fool as he is knave?"

"No, mistress, no, by no means," said the friendly defender of Mr. Joseph Parsons: for it was at his suit that the body of Sir Matthew had been arrested. "You may call the superintendent rogue, or knave, or what you will of

that kind, and I don't suppose there's many as would contradict you; but, as to his being a fool, especially as to the doing what he has done here, that he is not. 'Twas his only chance."

"And how much do you think he'll make of it?" demanded old Betty, with a sneer.

"Why, just the four hundred and sixty-seven pounds as is due to him," replied the man.

To all this poor Martha appeared not to pay the slightest attention, and, in truth, neither understood nor heard a word of it; but Michael did, and with sudden animation stepped up to the man who had spoken, and whispered in his ear, "Perhaps we may be able to settle this business without any further difficulty. Step out of the room with me, will you, for a moment? Your companion can do all that is necessary without you."

"Neither I nor my employer are people to make difficulties," replied the man; "and I am quite ready to hear you, young man, if you have got any thing to say upon the subject." They accordingly retired together; and in a wondrously short space of time the uninitiated Michael was made to understand all the circumstances of the case, the most important of which was that if, as Mr. Parsons hoped and

expected, Miss Martha could find ready money enough quietly to pay his little private account with the late Sir Matthew, the arrest would be immediately withdrawn, and the body left for her to dispose of it at her pleasure.

"And the sum," said Michael, "is—how much?"

"Four hundred and sixty-seven pounds," replied the man, "with some little matter, not exceeding four or five pounds more, for costs."

"Withdraw the arrest," said Michael, "and the money shall be instantly forthcoming."

"Let us see the money forthcoming," replied the fellow, grinning, "and the arrest shall be instantly withdrawn."

"Here is the money, sir," said Michael, taking out the pocket-book containing Martha's generous donation, and drawing from it notes to the amount demanded.

"Then the business will be soon settled, young gentleman. May I take the liberty to ask your name?"

"My name is of no consequence whatever, sir," replied Michael. "But lose no time in giving me the discharge. Only first enter that chamber with me once again, withdraw your companion from his frightful watch, and tell the poor young lady that it is over."

The man readily obeyed, and the mourning, but thankful Martha was once more left with her old servant, to watch beside her father's corpse.

CHAPTER X.

Mr. Augustus Dowling gives his sister Martha notice to quit the premises, which occasions Michael to appear in a new character—A long journey taken by novices, but they do not lose their way, and arrive at the right place at last.

THE circumstances which immediately followed are not of sufficient consequence to detain us long. Our old acquaintance, Mr. Augustus, now Major Dowling of the — regiment, quartered at the distance of a day's journey, was sent for to get through the melancholy business going on in his paternal mansion, as well as he could; to give orders respecting the funeral; and to make himself as thoroughly acquainted with the real state of his family affairs as circumstances would permit. Michael meanwhile had taken leave of the weeping Martha without having given her the slightest hint as to the means by which Sir Matthew's body had been released. Had he not known that the Mr. Augustus, whose kicks and pinches he so well remembered, was expected to arrive for the protection of his sister and of whatever

property they might still call their own, he would hardly have made up his mind to leave her, however conscious he might have been of the dutiful propriety of offering such protection as he could give. But it was evident that the poor girl thought he had better go, though it was equally so that she parted from him with the greatest reluctance.

"You shall hear from me," she said, "my good Michael; and if it should never be my good fortune to see you more, remember me with the same forgiving kindness that you have shown through all the dreadful scenes you have witnessed here. You have a good and generous heart, Michael, and though I know you suffered much by being present at them, you will always like to remember how greatly your presence helped to support your early friend in her great affliction."

But it was not destined that these sad scenes should be the last in which Michael and his early friend were to be thrown together. In little more than a week after the death of Sir Matthew, and while Michael was still anxiously waiting at Fairly for such tidings from her as might put him at liberty to set off without further delay for Nice, a packet reached him from Dowling Lodge, containing two letters.

One was from Martha, and contained these words:—

"Dear Michael,

"My brother tells me that all of us, who are old enough, must seek our own living, for that there is nothing left to support us. Myself, especially, he says, must, to use his own words, look about me directly, as my behaviour to my family has never been such as to justify my looking to any of them for assistance. This amounts to my being actually turned out of doors, an exigency which at this moment leaves me no other resource than what is afforded by the enclosed letter. Read it, Michael, and let me know if yon are willing to give me your assistance and protection in reaching the amiable writer of it. I would never have accepted, even for a day, the hospitality she generously offers, could I not prove to her, by bringing you with me, that the sad subject which interrupted our friendship some seven or eight years ago could never again be a source of pain to either of us.

"My dear father's last act towards me,—which was, as I think I told you, the placing a few hundred pounds in my hands for the express purpose of my leaving the country,—will enable me to undertake this long journey without being

a burden upon you. The green *pocket-book*, Michael, so well known to Mr. Parsons and Lady Clarissa as the repository of my father's money, and so disgracefully struggled for during his last moments, will prove of no value to its possessor beyond its morocco cover and its silken lining: for the notes which he took from it to give to me were the last he ever placed in it. My messenger has orders to wait for your reply. If it will suit you immediately to accompany me to Nice, my first stage shall be to the little inn at Fairly, which you mentioned to me. I fear you will find me a weak and troublesome traveller; but I think I have been improving in health ever since I learnt that I had not your death to answer for.

"Your grateful friend,
"MARTHA DOWLING."

The other letter was from Miss Brotherton, and ran thus:—

"Need I tell you, my dearest Martha, with what feelings I received the news of your present position? Your father's marriage with Lady Clarissa was, for your sake, a source of great sorrow to me, for I was certain that your domestic happiness would be destroyed by it; and this

most unexpected event of your father's bankruptcy makes me feel quite sure that you have no longer a comfortable home in England. Come then to me, my dear Martha! The painful estrangement which grew between us, just when I was beginning to know and value your excellent qualities, has long been a source of very severe regret to me, because I am aware that I judged you unfairly, and pronounced that judgment harshly. Be generous, then, and prove that you can forgive this, by immediately giving me the pleasure of receiving you as my guest. When we are together, we will consult about what will be best for the future; but at any rate I have the satisfaction of knowing that the climate to which I am inviting you is likely to be beneficial to your health during the approaching winter. Come to me, then, dear friend, without delay. On the other side you will find the route sketched that I recommend you for your journey. My quarters are roomy enough to accommodate either man or maid-servant, or both, if it will suit you to be so accompanied.

"Ever, my dear Martha,

"Affectionately yours,

"MARY BROTHERTON."

The consequence of this packet was another

metamorphosis on the part of Michael. "She shall not think," said he, addressing Mr. Bell "that my respect is lessened for her because her fortune has fallen. I will wait upon her with faithful duty, and most grateful affection; but she was born in a palace, and I in a cabin, and I will not, especially just now, obtrude myself upon her as a companion. As her servant I hope I may be useful to her, and it is in that capacity that I shall attend her."

There was so much good feeling shown in this project, that Mr. Bell could not oppose it, whatever he might think of its necessity; and Michael therefore gave the astonished Martha the meeting at the little inn she had named, in the character of a very neat and respectable-looking man-servant. Her faithful Betty Parker, who had consented to be the companion of her journey, was in the room with her when Michael made his appearance at the door, to receive her orders. The cautious manner in which he made her comprehend his purpose, and the nature of the office he had assumed, suggested to her the propriety of not discussing it in the presence of the well-contented Betty, who was exceedingly comforted by discovering that the young man whom her mistress had informed her would travel with them was to do so as her fellow-servant, as she

by no means felt herself capable of becoming "servant of all work" to a young lady travelling through foreign countries, of which she had never even heard the names. But having contrived to dismiss her female attendant on an errand, Martha began to remonstrate with her faithful squire upon the great mistake he had made in fancying that she had ever thought of travelling with him in any other capacity than that of a friend. All she said, however, was in vain. Michael, though in a manner the most humbly respectful, persisted in his purpose; and the almost destitute girl was therefore constrained to set off upon her travels in a style which she felt to be very unfitting her situation. Her conscience, however, could not reproach her for this, for most assuredly she could not help it.

Many were the letters, and various the mementos of affection intrusted by Mr. and Mrs. Bell to the care of Michael for their dearly-beloved Mary Brotherton. Nor was there an individual of whose welfare he thought it would please her to hear, whom he did not visit to receive their loving blessings for the benefactress who, notwithstanding her wide wanderings, had never failed to remember the wants of all who had faithfully served her, or in any way become dependent on her bounty.

These duties completed, and a farewell of grateful affection uttered to the amiable clergyman and his excellent wife, Michael set off upon his long journey with feelings of hope, joy, confidence, fear, diffidence, and trembling affection, all so strongly mixed together in his bosom, that, had his life depended on it, he could not himself have told which it was that most frequently preponderated. Yet, altogether, his state of mind was very delightful: the novelty and excitement of journeying, so pregnant of enjoyment to most of us, was most especially captivating to him, whose education had been little more than the unchecked development of imagination, and of that keen observation of all surrounding objects which his shepherd life had taught him.

The first painful interruption to the state of felicity arose from his finding himself under the necessity of confessing to Martha that he had no more money wherewith to pay their way. Aware that, in the performance of his self-appointed office, Michael would have to pay everything, and keep a regular account of it, and aware also that the money he had received from her would enable him to do this, without giving him the additional trouble of daily settlements with her, she had nearly said, a minute or two before

they set off, "You will be kind enough to be my banker, Michael, during the journey, and we will settle accounts at the end of it."

For just one week from the day of their leaving Fairly, he was able to do this; but then the little remnant of his treasure failed him, and great as was his repugnance to the measure, he was compelled by dire necessity to confess that nearly the whole of her generous gift had gone to—"satisfy the rapacity of Mr. Parsons."

It would be hardly possible for one human being to be more grateful to another than poor Martha felt to her young attendant after this disclosure. She remembered the agony which he had made to cease: she remembered, too, her state of utter incapacity even to comprehend, and still less to avert, the horrors that surrounded her; and spite of all Michael's respectful efforts to induce her to perform her allotted character properly, she never from the hour of this disclosure treated him otherwise than as a dear and valued friend.

As their journey approached its termination, however, to which period Michael had looked with peculiar anxiety, as that most important to the dignity of Martha, there was one argument, and one only, by which he was able to coax her into letting him make his first appear-

ance before Miss Brotherton in the character of her servant, and this was his very natural wish to ascertain whether Edward and Fanny would recognise him.

It was therefore still in the dress, and with the demeanour of a servant, that the poor factory boy, now become a tall and very handsome young man, armed himself with courage to enter the presence of his brother, and once more to draw near to the dear and gentle little being whom he had so fondly loved during the miserable period they had passed together at the Deep Valley. It had been previously agreed between himself and Martha, that when she sent for him, it should be for the purpose of giving him some long and particular instructions respecting the luggage he was to get from the custom-house, in order to give him time to look, and be looked at, before the moment of discovery should arrive.

The young man trembled like an aspen leaf as he laid his hand upon the lock of the door, the opening of which would bring him face to face with his brother. And perchance he might have indulged in a longer interval of preparation, had not the voice of Martha distinctly pronounced the words "Come in!" Further

delay was out of the question; he pushed forward the door, and entered.

The first figure that his eyes fell upon was that of a young lady, small, and of very delicate proportions, whose head, which was hanging over some employment as the door opened, was raised as he entered, displaying to him a very lovely face, and a pair of eyes whose dark brilliance almost made the beholder wink. Could that be Fanny Fletcher? No. Yet that it should be Miss Brotherton seemed more impossible still. Like all young people who have been separated from some one considerably older than themselves, ever since the period when this difference made one of them appear fully grown, while the other was still a child, Michael fancied that in Miss Brotherton he should see an elderly person, no more like a pretty girl than he was himself. But Mary Brotherton had not fully completed her twenty-ninth year, and happening moreover to be very peculiarly young-looking both in face and figure, it was not very wonderful that he should doubt of her identity: for it was in truth Mary Brotherton, and no other, whose bright and laughing loveliness made him turn his admiring eyes away, in search of something dearer, though not more beautiful.

At the end of the sofa table at which Miss Brotherton sat with Martha Dowling beside her, was a young female figure which presented only a profile to his gaze; but that was enough. The delicate oval face, the sweet, regular, small features, the glossy light brown hair, parted Madonna-like upon the ivory brow, and the long eyelash that seemed to rest upon her cheek as she read, all proclaimed that he looked upon the same gentle, lovely creature whose soft voice had whispered "Patience!" when his spirit, but for her, had died within him. At the sight of this sweet vision, that in shadowy and uncertain outline had so often visited his reveries, Michael's manhood almost forsook him, and large tears gathered in his eyes which he was fain to hide by turning round again and performing some blundering operation with the lock of the door. Martha played her part admirably, appearing to be the most exceedingly particular young lady about boxes, bags, and desks, that ever travelled.

"Remember, I beg," she said, "that you see yourself to the opening of every package. Don't let them touch a single article that you do not watch the whole time; and be sure that everything is locked again—and on no account forget the covers, or mismatch them—and remember

particularly—et cætera, et cætera;" and so she ran on, at the imminent risk of being classed by her clever friend Mary as the vainest fidget that ever arrived to bore a peaceable household; and all in order to give her poor companion time to recover himself, and see distinctly what was before him.

But Michael could not recover himself, nor could he find courage to look about him. It was a large saloon that Miss Brotherton occupied, and the agitated young man rather felt that there was a gentleman occupied with books and papers at a distant table than saw him. Yet to see him he was determined, if his life were to be the forfeit; and turning his head, with an eye as troubled as that of Hamlet when tremblingly following his father's spirit, he stood at last with clasped hands, protruded head, and features almost convulsed with emotion, when he had an uninterrupted view of his brother's calm and beautiful countenance.

Edward was very busily employed, and unconsciously submitted himself to this examination without raising his eyes, or moving in any way; but Miss Brotherton's ear caught something like a sob from the silent object of all Martha's eloquence, and, suddenly looking up, perceived Michael in the attitude described, but

stealthily, and perhaps unknowingly, approaching Edward's table, while the tears he could no longer check rolled down his manly cheek.

There are some individuals of the human family gifted with such quickness of perception and rapidity of inference, that their faculties act with the certainty of instinct and the brilliancy of inspiration. Miss Brotherton was one of those; and, after looking for a minute or two at Michael, quite as earnestly as Michael looked at Edward, she sprung from the sofa, pushed the table that stood before it with such violence from her as nearly to overset it, and rushing forward, laid her hand upon his arm, exclaiming—"For mercy's sake, tell me, young man, who you are, and where you come from!"

On hearing these words in a voice unusually loud and agitated, Edward rose hastily from his seat, and approached Miss Brotherton as if to protect her from some threatened danger; but turning towards him, she held up her hand as if to prevent his hostile approach, and said, "Stay, Edward, stay! Look at him! Good Heaven! Look at him, dearest Edward, and tell me who he is like!"

Thus addressed, Edward did look at his brother, and for a moment with a countenance that seemed to say Miss Brotherton had lost her wits;

but suddenly Michael smiled at him as he caught his puzzled eye, and then he started, and almost gasped for breath—and his distracted eyes fixed themselves on the agitated face before him, as if they would read in it the history of years.

"Edward!—Teddy!" cried Michael, opening his arms, and making a step in advance.

In the next instant the brothers were locked in each other's arms; and Miss Brotherton drew back, and gazed upon them from a distance, as if the very ground that sustained hearts under the influence of such feelings was holy—while Fanny Fletcher rose, and sat down, and rose again, checking the feeling that would have sent her to stretch forth a hand of welcome to her old friend, by telling herself that no hand, no voice but Edward's could be cared for then. And perhaps she was right; for it is certain that for several minutes neither Edward nor Michael were fully conscious where they were, nor who it might be that was near them. Once and again each beating heart was strained against the brother's heart; and then, their right hands clasped, and the left placed each on the other's sho u ler—

"They fell to such perusal of the face,"

which now, after eight cruel years of absence, was once more beaming with love and sympathy

before their eyes, that it must have been a very heartless and soulless being who should have come between them.

Though such a history as Michael's might well have occupied more than one long summer's day in the telling, to ears so greedy of every circumstance connected with it as were those of Edward, yet it is wonderful how very short a time sufficed to point out the key-stone of the arch upon which the whole wonderful fabric hung; and then it was that Fanny Fletcher's voice was heard exclaiming, in a burst of uncontrollable emotion—

"Then it was I who caused it all! Oh, Miss Brotherton, it was I who kept him in that horrid place for years! Had I not told you he was dead, it would have been he who would have been the happy object of your bounty, instead of me! Oh, how can he ever forgive me!"

This was uttered with such agitated rapidity, that though there was more than one present who would have been ready enough to contradict the self-accusing statement, she gave them no time for it. But it sufficed to draw Michael from the side of his brother, and to place him at hers; and though this terrible thought drew a shower of tears from Fanny's eyes, notwithstanding the exceeding happiness which was at the

very same moment throbbing at her heart, it may be that there could not have been found a more effectual mode of at once bringing back the long-parted friends to the same tone of familiar intercourse in which they had separated, as this sincere self-recrimination on one part, and the warm pleading against its injustice on the other. For some minutes this lasted without being interrupted by a word from any one, for both Mary and Edward found sufficient occupation in looking at them both, and thus exchanging expressive glances of thanksgiving and happiness with each other. But at length, upon Fanny's saying, with a fresh burst of tears—

"Oh, Michael! Michael! your eloquence is all in vain. You will never, never teach me to forget that I have been enjoying the blessed destiny intended for you, and that by means of words uttered by myself."

Upon her saying this, the happy Mary Brotherton pushed a low tabouret before the reunited friends, and seating herself upon it, took Fanny's hand in hers, and said, "If you would not cry about it, my Fanny, I should think it was a mighty pretty exhibition of true feeling and false argument that we were witnessing; but if you really intend to be unhappy, we shall all range ourselves immediately on Michael's side,

and laugh you to scorn for your sophistry, and the deplorable confusion you are making between cause and effect. I should like to know, little lady, how much it would have profited our Michael, had you refused to answer when I inquired at the Deep Valley factory, if you knew aught about him? had you, while firmly believing he was dead, declined to state your belief, lest you might be mistaken, what would it have availed him, darling? Could he have crept down before us from his sick bed to settle the question? No, dear casuist, you know better. Your looks are much more wiser than your words, Fanny: for even now, though you pretend to shake your head, your truth-telling eyes confess that you have not another syllable to say."

"But is it not singular," said Martha, who had been contemplating the scene with unspeakable delight,—"is it not singular that Michael should twice have been the victim of words uttered by such very friendly lips?"

"Singular, dear Martha?" replied Mary; "is not every event connected with a hero of romance of necessity, and by immutable prescription, singular? And whom did Fate and Fortune ever fix upon more unmistakably to fill that distinguished position in society, than Michael Armstrong? Why are we here altogether? Wholly and solely because Michael Armstrong

saved Lady Clarissa Shrimpton from the terrors inspired by a cow—is it not so, dear friends? Can any of you deny that all the exceeding happiness that blesses us at this moment has arisen from that marvellously silly adventure? And shall we any of us quarrel at the steps (though some of them, it must be confessed, were rough enough) which have led from that nonsensical beginning, to an end that has made us all so very happy? Yes, Michael Armstrong is a hero: he is our hero: he is the crowning hero that is come to make us all thank God for having brought us every one from greater and less degrees of misery to very perfect happiness, instead of tears, Fanny."

Nothing could have been more admirably suited to the effect which the happy heiress meant to produce than these words. How, after this, could Michael shrink, as he had expected to do, from the humiliating comparison between Edward and Fanny with himself? Or how could Fanny persist in weeping, when her own heart, as well as those of all around her, was so charmingly called upon to rejoice? Nothing of the sort was any longer thought of by either.

Without very well knowing how it came about, Michael, of all the multitude of contending feelings which had lately assailed him, being, as they were, of that most harassing race

Michael Armstrong is a hero, he is our hero

begotten between fear and hope, was now conscious of only one, and that one was happiness unmixed. His frank and generous nature could no longer harbour any doubts as to the place he held in the affections of those whom he had lately thought of as almost too high and too happy to remember him. He was with them—he was one of them. If a thought of the future glanced athwart the delicious present, it came accompanied by a buoyant consciousness that there was that within him which would enable him to redeem lost time, and that whatever those he loved wished him to be, THAT he should have power to become.

Nor was an answering confidence wanting in those who wearied not of his bright, expressive features, and his noble form. Fanny thought that he was exactly everything she would have dreamed he must be, had she ventured to dream that he existed at all: Mary thought that she read capacity which promised power to become all that Edward could wish him to be—and she was not disposed to wish for more; and Edward himself thought and felt that, had he power to choose a brother from among all the nations of the earth, and the noblest of those, Michael would have been the one he would have selected.

"And where is my dear, good Tremlett?" said Miss Brotherton. "In the midst of all this rare felicity she must not be left out. She has shared our mourning for your loss, dear Michael, and shame it were she should not share our joy at finding you."

"Shall I go and call her hither?" cried Fanny, rising.

"No, that you shall not, Fanny," replied Miss Brotherton. "I will not trust you. It was I who dragged the dear, good soul from post to pillar, in order to find you, Michael.—It was I, who never let her know rest, night nor day, because you were not, and who but I shall bring her the glad tidings of your restoration?"

But truly delighted as was Mary Brotherton at the idea of the pleasure which she well knew their unlooked-for arrival would cause her old friend, she would not let her taste it without the addition of a little mystification, and accordingly she led her into the room which contained the happy party, with no other preparation than telling her that there was a young Englishman in the saloon, to whom she must come and be introduced, because he was a countryman.

To this the tractable old lady agreed, without testifying any very lively emotion; but when she had got into the midst of the group, and wit-

nessed the general exaltation of spirits that seemed to possess them all, after looking and listening for a little while, she could not help whispering to Fanny, "Do you know, my dear, who that young man is? I never saw Miss Brotherton—no, nor Mr. Armstrong either—seem to be so extremely intimate with any one before, just on first sight."

In reply to this, Fanny only hid her face and laughed, for she dared not trust her voice to give the information required.

"How very odd!" murmured the old lady, drawing her knitting from her bag.

"It is very odd, Mrs. Tremlett, very odd indeed," said Mary, "there is no denying it. But the fact is, that Mr. Armstrong has taken such an extraordinary fancy to this young man, that I really think I shall be obliged to ask him to live with us. There will be plenty of room, you know, in my Rhenish castle."

The old lady said not a word in reply, but she looked puzzled, and vexed, and shook her head, as much as to say that it was not like her young mistress to talk such nonsense as that. So in her own defence Mary was obliged to explain the mystery; and as happy an old woman was nurse Tremlett, as she looked and listened, as ever tasted joy from the contemplation of it in others.

CHAPTER XI.

A *tête-à-tête*—A second—A third—A mysterious result—Conclusion.

DELIGHTFUL as was this state of mind to all that shared it, it could not last. Michael was too much in earnest in his dread of being a burden upon Miss Brotherton to permit many days to pass before he begged her to let him converse with her for a few moments in private; and Mary, who had already seen quite enough to convince her that the affection which Michael and Fanny had conceived for each other, amidst the dreary misery of the Deep Valley Mill, was not likely to be forgotten in the gay happiness of Nice, fully anticipated an humble confession, on the part of Michael, that he could not be happy without her permission to become the acknowledged lover of her charming friend and *protégé*, and very amiable, frank, and noble-minded did she consider it in him thus openly to avow the truth at once. But nothing could be further from the thoughts of Michael than making any such confession as this—which, it

may be observed, is by no means saying that his heart was either innocent or unconscious of the presumptuous passion she attributed to it.

Greatly, however, did Miss Brotherton underrate the young man's character, when she conceived that the gracious favour with which she had received him could generate in his heart a wish to ask for more.

"It is taking a great liberty, madam," began Michael.

"If you love me, do not call me madam, my dear Michael," she replied. "Do you not perceive that Edward and Fanny both call me Mary? And till I had taught them to do so I never could feel that they quite understood the true spirit of my attachment towards them, or the mode and manner of existence which I have imagined for myself, and which must have fallen to the ground if I had found them incapable of being to me, or letting me be to them, all that I wished and desired. You must not, dearest Michael, come and shake this perfect and delightful vision, introducing forms and ceremonies foreign to our manners and our feelings. Pray do not look so grave, dear friend! Promise to offend thus no more, and I will cease to scold you."

"Dearest Miss Brotherton!" said Michael.

But this did not satisfy the *exigeante* lady, who shook her head and held up her finger in reproof. "Dearest Mary! the—" he resumed, colouring brightly, and with a smile that made her think she could trace a family likeness to Edward, "the greatest wish I have on earth is to become such as you might approve, and, if I shrink from the dear and precious familiarity which must make Edward and Fanny so happy, think not that I am incapable of loving you as perfectly as they do; but remember, dearest lady! that, however humble their origin, the very circumstance of their having been your honoured companions for years is of itself sufficient to raise them to such a tone of thinking and of manners as may, in some sort, justify their using the privilege you so graciously afford. But, alas! you must know too well that the case is far different with me. The overflowing joy of our first meeting naturally broke down, as it were, all inequalities, all boundaries; and I certainly felt, and perhaps spoke, as if I too were one of the accomplished little circle that might call this earthly paradise their home. But reflection will come, most generous Mary! if not amidst the happy intoxicating moments of the day, it will make itself a voice in the quiet reasoning meditations of the night; and so loudly has this sweet

voice been heard by me, that I cannot—no, in spite of all the happiness that surrounds me, I cannot live as thus, an idle, ignorant dependant on your bounty!"

The heiress was half vexed, but more than half pleased, by this trembling address, the deep sincerity of which was testified by the working features of a countenance more than commonly expressive of all that passed within. She had enjoyed so much genuine happiness since the arrival of Michael, and had watched with pleasure so exquisite the happiness of Edward and Fanny, that she almost trembled at the idea of any change: yet she knew the boy was right: she knew that he ought to apply himself immediately and strenuously to such studies as were most necessary for the redeeming the time he had lost; and so well aware was she of this, that, notwithstanding her unwillingness to part with him, she rejoiced heartily to find that she was wrong as to the subject on which she had suspected he wished to speak. Had she been right in her conjecture, all she could have done would have been to endow the boy and girl with such a portion of her wealth as might have sufficed to make them independent; but, under such circumstances, all notion of essential improvement must of course be abandoned for ever, and for

many reasons this would have been a source of lasting regret to her. It was therefore with cordial approbation that, after the interval of a few moments, she replied, " Michael, you are right. Nature has done so much for you, my dear friend, that our wish to keep you constantly with us might easily, had you shown less courage, have tempted us to fancy that you wanted nothing which you have not got, or which we could not give you. But you are quite right in refusing to consent to this. We will immediately return to Germany, where you shall be placed at the same admirable institution that so rapidly made your brother what you now see him. Two years of well-directed devotion to study, my dear Michael, will perhaps make you feel more at your ease among us, though I doubt if it can produce any change which will make us love you better."

" Miss Brotherton! dearest Miss Brotherton!" exclaimed Michael, while perhaps the brightest beam of hope that ever yet shot from his eyes met hers as she affectionately gazed upon him,— " that was not what I—what I dared venture to hope and ask for. What you now propose would be a happiness, the idea of which I think I should have turned from, even in my dreams, from shame at its towering ambition. All I meant to ask was your kind aid to place me in

some business where I might earn a maintenance that in a year or two might prevent my being a burden to you—and now——"

"And now, Michael, I tell you fairly that I have not the slightest intention of doing any such thing. Besides my own particular objection to such a mode of proceeding, I have lately heard a little anecdote of you, from your friend Martha, which makes it very doubtful whether you deserve that species of indulgence—for she put it in you possession once, you know, and you could not keep it. I shall manage better, Michael, depend upon it. One week more of idleness in this sweet spot, and then we travel back to Germany. You shall not be left to study in a more forsaken condition than was your brother. We shall be within an easy distance of you, my dear Michael. One corner of my castle must hold us while another is beautified, and it is likely enough the work will go on all the better for our being there."

"And your visit to Rome given up for my sake?" cried Michael. "Oh, no, no, no!"

"No, no, no, most certainly," replied Mary, laughing; "I would not give up that journey, Michael, for more than I will say.

'All is not lost that is delay'd.'

Instead of giving up the plan, I only mean to improve it. Tell me, and tell me honestly, dear Michael, do you think in your heart that we shall, one and all, enjoy this journey more if you are with us?"

"Mary!" exclaimed the boy, wholly overcome, and seizing and kissing her hand with an emotion that at once and for ever banished all reserve, "Mary! it is your will to be loved, and who can disobey? But my happiness seems greater than I can bear! Where is Edward? Let me walk and talk with him! He is used to you, Mary, and all this may not seem to him so very much like a dream as it does to me. If he tells me it is all real, I shall believe it." And with these words, and his fine face glowing with all the best and happiest feelings of our nature, Michael bounded from the presence of his benefactress to seek his brother.

"I might have lived a good while in my fine house at Milford, and received a prodigious number of complimentary visits from my elegant neighbours, before I should have enjoyed half an hour as I have done this," thought the happy Mary Brotherton, as she strolled out through an open window that led to a little garden of orange-trees. "How delicious is the air this

morning!" But where was the climate where, at that moment, she would have felt it to be otherwise?

Michael had no difficulty in finding his brother, who in truth was lingering near on purpose to question him after this interview.

"Come with me, Edward!" cried the agitated boy, seizing his arm; "here are our hats—come with me into that little grove, yonder—my heart will burst if I do not instantly tell you what has passed." And arm-in-arm they crossed the road, and in a small enclosure opposite, found themselves under the shelter of a little wood, thick enough to exclude the peering eyes of mortals, as well as that of the sun.

Notwithstanding their eagerness for the communication which was to follow, and which was pretty equally strong in both, not a word was uttered by either till they reached this covert, and then Michael, throwing himself upon a bank and casting his hat away, clasped his hands, and, raising his eyes to heaven, exclaimed, "Edward, she is an angel!"

Edward had not followed his brother's example in lying down, but stood before him in act to listen. But there was something in these words that seemed to shake him, for he turned away without answering.

"Has she ever named to you her plans about me?" resumed Michael.

"Yes!" replied Edward.

"Then you know that it is not her intention to assist me, by enabling me to learn any trade or handicraft?"

"No such idea, Michael, ever entered her head," said Edward, gravely.

"But, my dear fellow! you seem to take all this so very coolly. Do you know that it is her intention to send me to the same place where your education was completed?—Do you know that she gives up—to—that she postpones her journey to Italy till I am ready to go with her?—Edward, do you know all this?"

"My dear brother," replied Edward, "I only know that, from the moment she learnt you were alive, she determined that she would immediately make you perfectly independent, as she has done me. All the rest, I think, depended upon your own inclination; and, had she not found you disposed for this scheme, she would not have insisted upon it."

"Disposed for it, Edward? Oh, what cold, what chilling words! You could not speak so if you thought there were any hope of my profiting by it, or of becoming a fit companion for

you—for her—for Fanny. But it is too late—you feel that it is too late—is it not so, Edward?"

"No, Michael, no!" returned Edward, with sudden animation. "With your faculties, your eager desire to learn, and the masters you will have to put you in the way of doing so, I KNOW that the result of these two years of study will be all you wish, and all your friends can desire."

"Then how can you receive this glorious news, my Edward, so composedly?"

"First, dear Michael, because it is no news to me; and, secondly, because I am a selfish wretch, and was thinking, perhaps, more of my own interest than of yours. Forgive me for it, my own dear Michael! But I would rather have had it decided that we should have both marched off, and taken service under the Emperor of Austria. I know that commissions would have been obtained for us."

Michael, as his brother uttered these words, looked up into his face with an expression of such astonishment and dismay, that the blood rushed to Edward's face, and he turned away to conceal his confusion.

"Edward! you are a mystery to me," exclaimed Michael, springing upon his feet, and taking his brother by the arm. "Can it be

possible that you are weary of the life you lead? Oh, heaven! and such a life!"

"Weary? Am I weary of it, Michael? Weary of rising every day to feel that I am a wretch unworthy to breathe the breath of life anywhere? And, oh, how utterly unworthy to breathe it here!"

It was now poor Michael's turn to change colour, and he did so pretty violently—for first he became very red, and then exceedingly pale. That Edward, such as he had ever remembered him, such as he found him now,—that he should so very solemnly declare himself to be a wretch unworthy of life, was a horror and a misery as terrible as it was unexpected. He had no power to utter any soothing words in contradiction to this appalling statement—for, alas! it might be true; and Michael's heart sunk within him as he remembered how totally ignorant he was of anything that might enable him to disturb it. Silently the brothers walked on for some paces, side by side. They were both of them either unwilling or unable to speak. At length a sort of shuddering emotion that passed through Michael's frame made itself felt by the arm of Edward, which he still held, and then he stopped, and, without raising his eyes from the ground, said,—

"Michael, how is it you understand me? Do you suppose that I have been guilty of some criminal act, such as doom some to the gallows? If not, why do you shudder thus?"

"Would you not shudder, Edward, if you heard me say that I was a wretch unworthy to live?"

"Poor Michael! perhaps I might; but still I doubt if I should understand the phrase as you do. It is so difficult, so impossible to express temperately and soberly my own reprobation of the feelings that destroy me! And yet, dear Michael," he continued, more tranquilly, "I could have fancied that there was something working in your own heart which might have taught you in some degree to guess the state of mine. I have no strength, no courage, to enter on the guilty subject fully—but, that you may not think me a felon, Michael, I will tell you in one audacious word, I LOVE, and that with a fervour, a vehemence of passion, that often makes me tremble at myself: for, did it ever master me so far as to force a confession of it in the presence of its object, I never could look up again, but should for ever become an alien from all I love, and a friendless wanderer on the face of the earth."

Though shocked more deeply than he had

any wish or power to express, Michael could not resist the belief, which came with terrible strength upon him, that his unhappy brother had conceived a passion for some married woman, and that his best chance of recovering both his virtue and his tranquillity would be by following the wish he had expressed, and, by entering on a new and active career, to give himself a chance of obliterating from his mind the feelings which had so unhappily taken possession of it. Such a destination must of course destroy some of the very brightest of his own beautiful day-dreams: but there was a fund of integrity and real goodness in the heart of Michael that permitted him not at that moment to think of himself.

"Edward!" said he, solemnly, "if this be so, follow the course that your better feelings have suggested—adopt at once the profession of a soldier. It has ever been accoutned a noble one—though, under happier circumstances——But that matters not. If your passions have led you wrong, let your principles bring you back again. Confess the truth to your generous benefactress at once."

"Michael!" replied Edward, looking in his face with an expression of suffering that almost amounted to agony—"I would rather die first!"

These words seemed intended to close the

conversation, or at any rate they did so, for the two brothers silently retraced their path to the house, and a fond pressure, expressive of love and pity, which Michael gave to the arm of Edward before he parted from it, was all that passed between them further at that time.

The interview of that morning with Miss Brotherton had awakened in the mind of Michael feelings towards her which, an hour before, he would have thought it must have taken years to produce; but, being equally sincere both in his former timidity and his present confidence, he speedily made up his mind to open his heart to her, and do for his guilty but suffering brother what it was evident he had not courage to do for himself. In pursuance of this resolution he again sought the heiress, and whispered in her ear, "Mary!—will you let me talk to you a little more?" She eagerly complied with the implied invitation, and, passing her arm through his, accompanied him to the scene of their former *tête-à-tête*.

There was no shyness on the part of Michael. The familiar appellation he had used was not assumed for the purpose of proving his obedience, but resulted from a genuine feeling of affectionate confidence in every word that she had uttered, and which had left the impression on

his mind that she was not only his generous patroness, but his loving friend.

"I little thought, when I was talking to you this morning about my poor self," he said, "that I should so soon have to take you away from your drawing to talk about Edward."

"About Edward!" said Mary, colouring; "What do you wish to say about him, dear Michael?"

"It is something he declares he would die rather than say to you himself," replied Michael; "but I am certain that you ought to know it, for it is quite clear that there is no chance of happiness for him unless you agree to his wishes."

"What wishes?" exclaimed the heiress, terribly agitated. "For God's sake, Michael, do not trifle with me! Did Edward commission you to speak to me?"

"Oh, no! Had he felt courage to do *that*, I should have told him at once that he had better do it himself," replied Michael. "Indeed, I fear greatly that he will be displeased with me; but I cannot bear to see him so miserable without mentioning it to the only person capable of helping him."

"Miserable?—Helping him?—Tell me, Michael, tell me at once what you mean!"

"That is exactly what I wish to do, dear Mary!" replied Michael, looking with considerable surprise at her varying colour and agitated features; "but I fear I am doing wrong, and that I have already said something that vexes you."

"No, no," cried Mary, impatiently, "only go on!"

"In one word, then," resumed Michael, "our dear Edward wishes beyond all things to enter the Austrian service."

"And leave us!" returned the heiress, almost gasping. "Does Edward want to leave me?"

"Do not suspect him of ingratitude, Mary!" cried Michael, eagerly: "there is a reason for it, and without this I am quite sure he would never think of such a thing. Edward has conceived an unfortunate passion for an object from whom he ought to fly—and this, of course, will explain everything to you."

"Let me see him! Let me hear him! From himself, and from himself only, I can fear this—let it mean what it may."

On uttering these words, which were spoken with a very agitated and untranquil air, Mary Brotherton rushed out of the room, much to Michael's astonishment: for he could by no means comprehend *why* she should testify such

very strong emotion, especially as he had so courteously and delicately avoided hinting anything about a married woman's being unhappily the object of his brother's passion.

In this ignorance of Michael's, the reader, I am very sorry to say, must share. There are some facts which no wise historian will ever dilate upon, lest their strangeness should provoke incredulity; and great wisdom is shown by such forbearance: for it is infinitely better that an enlightened public should be driven to exclaim, "*How very obscure this passage is!*" than "*How very improbable!*"

Michael Armstrong is the hero of the book that is now drawing rapidly to its conclusion; and every reader has therefore a right to expect that his destiny shall be plainly announced to them, whatever mystery may hang over that of others. Whatever occurred between the heiress and Edward in the conference which they speedily held together, it did not cause any alteration in that lady's purpose of immediately returning to her château upon the Rhine. A man of worth and great ability was engaged to take charge of the richly-teeming, eager mind of Michael during the two years that it was settled he should remain at a German university; and nothing could be more satisfactory than the

result of this arrangement. Never, perhaps, were two years put to greater profit in the development of mind than upon this occasion; and, when they were ended, Michael Armstrong was able to take his stand upon the beautiful terrace, without feeling that he was out of place there.

Less than two years had sufficed to bring to perfection all Mary Brotherton's plans for improving and beautifying her spacious residence. It was one of those superterranean gnomes which are sometimes seen to spread themselves to such miraculous extent in that region, and would have inspired most ladies with a feeling of dreary vastness, which, notwithstanding the exceeding beauty of its position, would have prevented any hope of rendering it comfortably habitable. But Mary had an ample heart and an ample purse. Circumstances over which (to use a thoroughly authorised expression) she had no control—for in truth they had preceded her birth—had rendered her own country less dear to her than it is to most others; and she therefore not only determined to plant herself elsewhere, but to do so in such a manner as would enable her to make her new abode her home in the best sense of the word; and this could only be done by giving

"Ample room and verge enough"

to make it the home of others also. Any travellers lucky enough to light upon this widely-spreading, but comfortable and thoroughly well kept-up abode, will find that, notwithstanding its great extent, it has by no means the air of being uninhabited. Nobody will be much surprised to hear that Michael Armstrong and Fanny Fletcher became man and wife, or that they proved a loving and very happy pair: but should any curious Rhenish tourist obtain an introduction to this Rhingau paradise, he will probably observe *two* very loving and happy pairs, to whom it serves as a common, yet, in some sort, a separate home, each having its suite of drawing-rooms, boudoirs, nurseries, school-rooms, et cetera. But, however much a gossipping inclination might lead to a more explicit detail, there is really no room left to enter upon it. All that can be said in addition to this is, that when Sir Matthew Dowling's affairs came to be wound up there was discovered to be a sufficient surplus to afford a small independence to each of his children, which, being divided according to the proportion dictated by the knight's will, gave something like a Benjamin's mess portion to his daughter Martha. To claim and receive this, as well as occasionally to visit some members of her family, Martha made frequent excursions to

England ; but her happiest hours were those she passed with her dear friends in Germany, by whom she is ever received with open arms.

Mrs. Tremlett is still enjoying an old age of perfect comfort, cheered by warm affection, and is already the darling of many little hearts.

There is no record to be found in any documents relating to the inhabitants of the château showing that Edward Armstrong ever entered the Austrian service. It is, therefore, most reasonable to suppose that this wish was never complied with.

THE END.

London : Printed by W. Clowes and Sons, Stamford Street.

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